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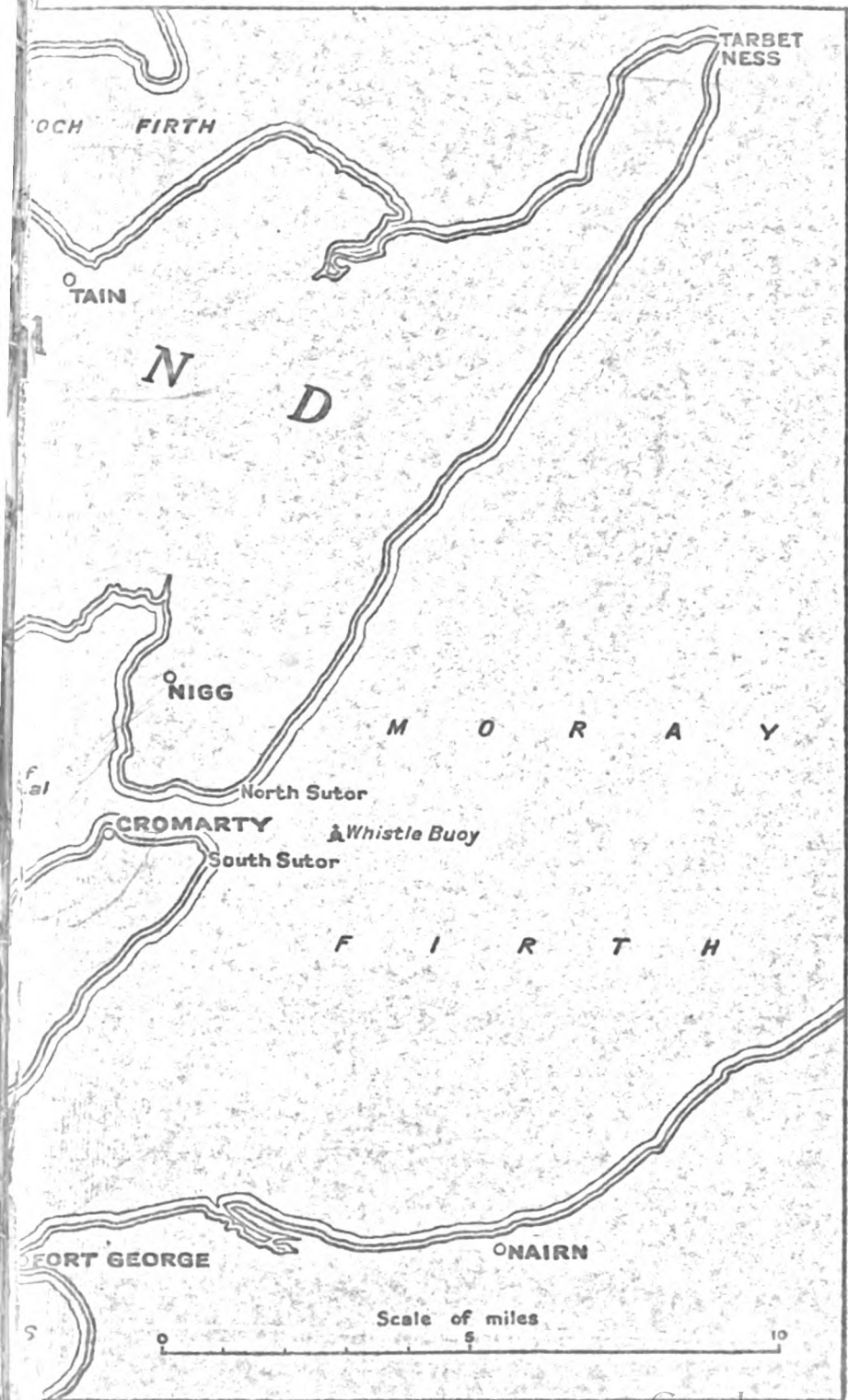
INVERGORDON

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Sir



THE MUTINY AT INVERGORDON

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To
H. W. A.

PREFACE

THE high tradition of the Royal Navy has been created and maintained by the observance of three principles: duty on the part of the personnel; consideration for their welfare by the administration; loyalty to Country and King throughout. Six years ago the first two principles broke down, but the fundamental loyalty remained unshaken.

In the absence of clear and full statement the truth has too often been distorted by an atmosphere of mystery and suspicion. It has even been thought abroad and feared at home that the Royal Navy—the strongest force in the world for peace—is suspect. Now when the need for increasing the material resources of the Navy is at last recognised, it is the more vital that faith in the men who man it should be fully restored.

It is in this spirit that the author has set himself to tell the true story of Invergordon. In the same spirit many naval officers and others have given their assistance. These require no formal thanks. "The good of the Service" is at once their creed and their reward.

Sooner or later the world must recognise that unlimited expenditure upon armaments cannot be continued. There will follow reductions, economies,

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and a renewal of the belief that war is impossible. There will again be attacks upon the morale of the Defence Services. Unless the lessons of Invergordon are learnt there will be danger of repetition which may result in ultimate disaster. This does not mean that the morale of the Royal Navy is precarious. The reverse is true. Invergordon was the culmination of the effects of short sighted policies extending over more than a decade. Morale in a large body of men, as Lord Jellicoe realised, must be faithfully nursed—not taken for granted as it was by the Board of Admiralty in 1931.

The mutiny itself was not regarded as such by the majority of the men. They regarded it as the logical application to the Naval Service of methods employed with success in other walks of life. That such action should have appeared logical is a measure of the extent to which the men of the Royal Navy had been subjected to outside influences. That it should have been put into effect is a measure of the lack of realisation of their obligations by the Naval Administration. The British sailor is second to none in loyalty, and the Royal Navy has a standard of service which shines above that of any other section of the community. But the personnel of the Navy demands understanding of its peculiar difficulties and problems, for it is upon the foundation of understanding that the whole fabric of discipline and morale is built.

There are some who hold that Invergordon is

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best forgotten. Invergordon is history. The greatness of the British Empire has been built upon the faculty of the race for learning aright the lessons of history. To ignore history because it is unpleasant is to turn a blind eye to its lessons. When Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye he did so, not in flinching from the enemy, but to avoid seeing a signal to retreat. There must be no retreat from Invergordon.

K. E.

Seend,
August 1937.

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“We have often pointed out the errors which have existed, and still do exist, in a service which is an honour to its country; for what institution is there on earth that is perfect, or into which, if it once was perfect, abuses will not creep? Unfortunately, others have written to decry the service, and many have raised up their voices against our writings, because they felt that, in exposing error, we were exposing them. But to this we have been indifferent; we felt that we were doing good, and we have continued.”

Captain Marryat.
“*Mr. Midshipman Easy.*”

I

NEWS OF MUTINY

ON the evening of September 15th, 1931, the following statement was issued to the Press by the Admiralty:

"The Senior Officer, Atlantic Fleet, has reported that the promulgation of the reduced rates of naval pay has led to unrest among a proportion of the lower ratings.

"In consequence of this he has deemed it desirable to suspend the programme of exercises of the Fleet and to recall ships to harbour while investigations are being made into representations of the hardships occasioned by certain of the cuts in pay, in order that these may be reported for the consideration of the Board of Admiralty."

By this statement the Admiralty announced that a mutiny had taken place in the Fleet.

There had been mutinies in other Services. There had been minor "incidents" in the Royal Navy. But this official statement of September 15th, 1931, hinted at something on a scale which had not been considered since the days of "The Floating Republic" at the Nore in 1797.

Once before in the same generation had the faith of the public in the Royal Navy been shaken. In the early June of 1916 the first news of the Battle of

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Jutland was concerned solely with British losses. There was official reticence coupled with official confusion. Statements were issued which were but half-truths and which had the inevitable result of persuading the public that a battle which history has proved a great naval victory was, in fact, an ignominious defeat.

Fifteen years later, Whitehall, faced with the first news of the mutiny at Invergordon, attempted by the same tactics to hoodwink the country with half-truths.

These failed. Within a few hours the Admiralty issued a further statement:

“Their Lordships have approved the exercises of the Atlantic Fleet being temporarily suspended while certain representations of hardship under new rates of pay are being investigated for the consideration of their Lordships.”

It was immediately clear that there had been a hasty meeting of the Board of Admiralty after the issue of the first statement, and that those present at this meeting, having information which was not available to the public, had had no option but to confirm and approve the action of the Senior Officer at Invergordon.

This was made more obvious because the two statements appeared concurrently in the morning newspapers of September 16th.

The same afternoon Sir Austen Chamberlain, First Lord of the Admiralty, announced in the House

of Commons that the ships of the Atlantic Fleet had been directed to return forthwith to their home ports, where personal investigations would be made by the local Commanders-in-Chief.

Suddenly the full significance of the two official statements of the day before was brought home to the public. It became obvious that matters were very much worse than had at first been admitted by the Admiralty, and that the disaffection in the Atlantic Fleet was so serious that the Government had no alternative but to order the ships home.

The realisation that there was insubordination of a very serious character in the Royal Navy delivered a blow to the nation which was almost personal in its intensity. The Englishman is a reserved creature. He would be loath to admit that he considers the Royal Navy the most stable of all the institutions of the world. Yet, in British minds, for more than two centuries, the Royal Navy had been regarded as the symbol of Great Britain's character and fortune; the very foundation of her security.

The Press was non-committal. The responsible newspapers referred to the disaffection in the Fleet following upon the promulgation of the pay cuts as "unrest," and, in the first instance, refrained from all comment.

The effect of this departure from the normal newspaper procedure of publishing with full comment all news of national importance was to create a feeling that censorship was being imposed. As if

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in confirmation of the view that Whitehall had muzzled the Press, all newspapers used the word "unrest" to describe what had taken place. This was the same word as had been used in the first official statement issued by the Admiralty. The impression that all news about Invergordon was being dictated from Whitehall was further strengthened by one of the more responsible newspapers using the word "unrest" in inverted commas in its headlines.

There was no indication in any newspaper of what the term "unrest" might mean. There was no hint of how many ratings were involved in the "unrest." "Unrest" and "a proportion of," both utterly equivocal terms, gave only the smallest clue to the truth.

It was left to the men and women of the whole civilised world to put their own interpretation on these statements. It was concluded that a censorship had become necessary, and that the Press was under orders to minimise the true facts. Immediately an atmosphere was created in which rumour and exaggeration had full rein.

So strong was the belief that the British Press was being subjected to censorship that a New York newspaper stated positively on September 16th: "Unofficial intimations have been conveyed to the British newspapers that the Government hopes they will content themselves to-morrow morning with the fair statement of the case by the Admiralty, and

will not run the risk of making serious trouble by elaborating the matter before a careful investigation is made."

In fact, however, no censorship was imposed on the British Press. The newspapers confined themselves on the morning of September 16th to the Admiralty statement because no further news was obtainable from Invergordon, where all leave had been stopped and where there was no communication between the ships and the shore.

The atmosphere thus created was most undesirable. Yet the attitude of reticence on the part of the Government and the responsible Press was in accordance with British tradition. The Royal Navy was recognised as part of the life of the British Empire. This was realised more clearly in Whitehall and Fleet Street than by the average Englishman. The British public is incoherent except in emergency. Then its usually amorphous opinions crystallise suddenly. Whitehall knew this. So did Fleet Street. They knew that the whole attitude of the British public towards the Royal Navy had been accurately summed up in the four words of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, spoken two years before: "Our Navy is us." Knowing this, Whitehall and the newspapers realised that they were treading holy ground. Accusations could not lightly be made against the Royal Navy. Reticence was necessary.

Yet events proved reticence to be unjustified and damaging, partly because of the importance of the

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events themselves, and partly on account of the lurid backcloth against which they were played.

For six weeks the credit of Great Britain had been attacked as it had never been attacked before. There had been a general crumbling of what were regarded as the foundations of stability. For a moment, when a credit of £80,000,000 was guaranteed by the United States and France, there had been a breathing-space. But it had been short-lived. Calamity had piled on calamity. The Government of the day had been shown to be overspending itself. The report of the May Committee on economy had given blunt and uncomfortable counsel—£120,000,000 to be saved within the year or the Empire would be bankrupt.

The Labour Government had not known how to achieve these life-saving measures. It could not rely upon its own supporters. There had been a period of unbearable anxiety while Cabinet and committees met but no decisions were reached. Then the King had returned in haste from Balmoral. The Prime Minister had resigned, and there had followed the formation of the first Coalition Government since the Great War. In this country a Coalition Government meant, to the lay mind, a very serious danger to the nation.

An emergency budget was introduced, designed to put the finances of the country in order. A clarion call was issued to all members of the community to share cheerfully in sacrifice.

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In the midst of these events the whole country had been flooded with propaganda denouncing economy as an unnecessary evil dictated by American and French bankers and exhorting the workers to resist it to the utmost. The atmosphere was charged. There was a fear that some tragic climax might come at any moment. Yet the Englishman continued to 'set his faith in the national characteristic of "muddling through" and the conviction that everything would turn out all right in the end.

The May Committee had recommended drastic economies. That part of the nation which was really aware of the true state of the finances of the country supported the May Committee. *The Times* printed many letters demanding that economy should precede additional taxation. Yet five days after the passing, without a division, of the emergency budget there was revolt against its economies from the least expected quarter—the Royal Navy.

The British people have an unfortunate habit of forgetting, once peace has descended upon the world, the Services upon which they have been entirely dependent during the years of peril. No Service has suffered more in this respect than the Royal Navy. Drake was ostracised in the year following his defeat of the Armada. Rooke was disgraced a few months after he took Gibraltar. Raleigh was beheaded. Byng was shot. Hawke was burnt in effigy. Rodney was recalled in ignominy.

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Nearly all our greatest sea leaders in war suffered from the ingratitude of the nation in peace, and perhaps none more than Admiral Vernon, who was ruined because he insisted upon bringing to light the grievances of the men of the lower deck.

So it was after the Great War. The Royal Navy, from being a sure and essential shield, came to be regarded as an extremely expensive luxury which was to a great extent redundant. The British Empire had just emerged, victorious but unutterably weary, from the "war to end war." In a world "safe for democracy," in which war could have no place, a fighting Service was obviously an anachronism. A small police force was necessary, but that was all. This philosophy led to the era of disarmament, in which it became only right and proper that economies should be effected at the expense of the Defence Services.

It is now recognised that altruism was carried much too far. It should have been recognised a decade before it was, not so much from the material point of view but because there were indications that morale was being adversely affected. The serious disturbances which had broken out in the Army immediately after the war had been successfully dealt with by disbandment and demobilisation, and it was not realised that too close adherence to the policy of retrenchment was having the opposite effect in a permanent Service.

In spite of policies which reduced the Royal

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Navy to a mere shadow of its pre-war strength, in spite of the fact that there were signs that all was not well in this great Service, the British Navy was still regarded both at home and abroad as the greatest bulwark the world possessed against the forces of disruption. This view was accentuated by the bewilderment caused by the vast complications of a rapidly changing world. Men and women clung unconsciously to the few things which promised permanence.

This was even more true abroad than in this country, for abroad people were living at closer quarters with the clash of forces and opinions which reached the British Isles as little more than an echo.

On this account the news that serious insubordination had occurred in the British Navy caused an even greater shock abroad than it did in Great Britain. If there had been a mutiny in any other navy it would have been merely an item of news. This was the case with the mutiny in the Chilean Navy, which was raging at the time that the news of Invergordon burst upon the world. But the British Navy was in a different category altogether. If that broke up, anything might happen.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs, in its survey of these events, stated that the sensation was heightened outside Great Britain itself because foreign observers saw in them "a revolutionary outbreak of the kind which, in the Russian Fleet,

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had precipitated the Russian Communist Revolution of 1917 and in the German Fleet the German Revolution of the following year."

Events have proved that the foreign observers were wrong. But their instincts were right. Close examination of the mutiny itself and of the events which led up to it show that the forces working for world revolution had hoped to use the British Navy to bring revolution to the British Isles, and that the grievances of the men on the lower deck were exploited to these ends.

At the time of the Invergordon mutiny newspapers all over the world were suffering from a plethora of important news. Space was at a premium. Yet everywhere the news of mutiny in the British Navy was given great prominence. In fact the news of the mutiny in the Royal Navy was given far more prominence in the newspapers abroad than at home. Even in the United States, that most insular of all democracies, Invergordon was very much front page news. There it was a matter of added importance, for the United States had regarded the Royal Navy in a spirit of rivalry ever since the end of the Great War, when she had realised that she had amassed vast quantities of promissory notes, but that, unless the British naval building which was then contemplated was checked, she would have to resign herself to falling back into the secondary position which she had occupied in the world before the Great

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War. Americans realised that being a creditor did not build battleships, and that America, the greatest creditor the world had ever seen, could not compete with Great Britain on the seas at the rate of building then obtaining without serious risk to her own internal stability.

Thus was the Washington Naval Treaty conceived. It was born to the American plan. Equality was achieved by the scaling down of British naval power to the American level. Yet still there was a feeling in America that the British Navy remained without equal. It was not without cause. America knew full well that England produces a race of seamen, and that no difficulty was arising, or would ever arise, in the manning of the ships, while in the United States the supply of efficient man power with the sea-going tradition was seriously short. Small wonder, then, that the news of the Invergordon mutiny made a deep impression in America. In it there was at last proof that the British sailor was not the infallible creature Americans had believed. It carried the levelling process further—and again it was levelling by the scaling down of Britain to a level easily attainable by America.

Yet America, or the American newspapers, proved that they had a sure grip of the situation. There was no alarmist exaggeration. There was only the blunt statement of facts—many of them facts which had been deliberately suppressed in the

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British Isles. And where editorial comment was made this was both shrewd and sober. The *New York Times* recalled the fact, assiduously hidden from British eyes, that Great Britain had been flooded with subversive propaganda ever since the report of the May Committee had recommended drastic economies. "Ever since the Government's program was announced, the country has been flooded with propaganda denouncing the economies as needless, and as something dictated by American and French bankers as the only condition under which they would assist England to restore the security of the pound sterling."

On the continent of Europe the sense of shock was obviously greater than in America. In all countries the mutiny of the British Fleet was regarded as the fall of another stronghold to the attacks of Communism. In no country was this more the case than in France. This was to be expected, for France had learnt to realise that her security depended to a great extent upon the power of the British Navy, and France had recently experienced rapid growth in the power of the Left.

The incidents at Invergordon were interpreted in France as the direct result of the influence of Soviet Russia. On the day following the first publication of the news the *Journal des Débats* remarked that "the grave incidents in the British Fleet are interpreted by France as a warning of what comes of the policy of weakness towards the Soviet

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Union. . . . Weakness in regard to the Soviet is a danger to the moral health of the Army and Navy. It simply plays into Soviet hands. Let us hope that our neighbours will accept the lesson of these events, and also that they may give our own good Government cause for thought."

Le Temps was no less definite. "The danger from subversive Soviet propaganda has been real in Britain ever since the two countries resumed normal diplomatic relations. To-day we see the consequences."

It seems curious that the country whose newspapers expressed such outspoken hostility to Soviet Russia should within five years have entered into an alliance with that country; an alliance which has proved one of the most contentious questions in Europe.

The attitude of Germany was very much the same as that of France, but it was marked by a conspicuous split of opinion. Germany at that time was still Socialistic almost to the point of Communism. Yet there was a large body of opinion hostile to that regime. Therefore in Germany there was, on the one hand, the conviction that the mutiny of the British Navy was the work of Communists from Russia—a conviction expressed even more bitterly than in France—and, on the other hand, ostentatious jubilation on the part of the Communistic section of the community. These hailed the mutiny at Invergordon as a tremendous

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stride towards the achievement of world revolution, and many of them went so far as to exhort the British sailors to carry the mutiny to lengths which would have been utterly abhorrent to them.

Italy at that time was deeply concerned with setting its own house in order. The idea of mutiny in the British Fleet was utterly repugnant to the Fascist ideal. Perhaps it was for fear of giving the Italian people proof that Communism was so powerful a force that the Italian newspapers, alone of all those of Europe, sought to minimise the mutiny to the point almost of ignoring the occurrence.

In Japan also the presentation of the news and responsible comment was coloured to a great extent by hostility to Russia. And here again there was evidence that all that was known in Japan was not finding its way into the newspapers. Japan has a way of acting when there is every reason to believe that the Powers who would normally be opposed to such action are preoccupied with other matters. On September 19th, 1931—four days after the announcement by the British Admiralty that there was “unrest” in the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon—came the news that Japan had embarked upon armed hostilities in Manchuria. Mr. Henry L. Stimson, who was Secretary of State in Washington at the time, has stated that: “If anyone had planned the Manchurian outbreak with a view to freedom from interference from the rest of the world, his time was well chosen.”

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Perhaps the reticence of the Japanese Press was due in part to the knowledge that in Russia the news of the mutiny was being hailed as a victory for the workers against the forces of capitalism.

These reactions abroad to the fact that disaffection had shown itself in the British Navy had an immediate and direct effect upon Great Britain. The pound sterling had been saved by credits from abroad, and by the increase of confidence caused by the establishment of the National Government and the publication of the terms of the "belt-tightening budget." The budget was introduced on September 10th, and it was not long before its effect was discernible in financial circles. On September 14th *The Times* announced: "It is already clear that the budget has had an immediate effect in reviving confidence abroad in British credit."

Yet, as those words were being written, events at Invergordon were taking the course which was to give the pound sterling, "which was already balancing dizzily 'on the razor's edge,' the last rude blow that drove it, crashing, off the gold standard."

This blow, although drawing its strength from Invergordon, was actually delivered from abroad. The strength of the blow, moreover, was the strength of the impression created abroad that disaffection in the British Navy was the first sign of a general break-up of the British Empire.

The first news of the insubordination in the

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Atlantic Fleet came to the London Stock Exchange from France. This fact was interpreted by a nervous market as indicating that the British Press was under censorship, and nervousness increased. There was a spate of selling of British securities. Foreign operators wished to get rid of them immediately. They were in that frame of mind which thinks of nothing but cutting losses. It was foreign selling that forced the issue and led to the suspension of the gold standard.

In the light of after-events it would appear that a greater frankness on the part of the Admiralty and the British Government might have allayed nervousness and averted some, at least, of the flight of capital from London. Be that as it may, events have surely proved that over-reticence in official quarters did great harm to the reputation of the British Navy. This has been reflected in nearly every facet of British foreign policy in the past six years—years in which foreign confidence in the stability and strength of the Royal Navy was more important than ever before.

Foreign opinion is not yet convinced of the underlying soundness of the personnel of the British Navy. In the back of the minds of most foreigners there is the memory of Invergordon and the feeling that mutiny would be liable to break out again if opportunity were given to agitators and if provocation existed. The proof that this feeling exists lies in the frequent rumours of unrest in the Royal Navy.

NEWS OF MUTINY

Some of these are purely British in origin and too absurd to demand any credence.

There was, for example, the report a few years ago that the crew of H.M.S. *Hood* had mutinied at Invergordon and that the mutineers were being hunted in the surrounding hills by armed Marines. All this arose from the fact that parties of seamen and Marines from the *Hood* had been landed and were having a field-day in the neighbourhood. Absurd as these reports were, they showed that a certain section of the British public was receptive to the idea of mutiny in the Royal Navy. It is almost certain that no such report would have circulated in the days before September 1931.

Far more serious, because more insidious and more difficult to ridicule, have been the reports of disaffection in the British Navy which have been current from time to time on the continent of Europe.

During the Mediterranean crisis following upon the Italo-Abyssinian conflict reports were widely circulated abroad to the effect that the crews of British warships both in the Eastern Mediterranean and at Gibraltar were on the verge of open mutiny. These reports were believed not only abroad but by a considerable section of the public at home. There seemed to be ample justification for disaffection. The crews of many of the ships had had to forgo leave for which they were long overdue, and they were kept on tenterhooks, pawns in a policy

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which was clear to nobody. Moreover, certain happenings tended, in minds tuned to the idea of disaffection, to prove the rumours true. When some ships were ordered away from Gibraltar to ports within two days' steaming distance of that base, it was immediately said that it had become necessary to effect a separation of the ships to avoid the spread of subversive influences. In face of these rumours and beliefs, an Admiralty announcement to the effect that ships were being moved away from Gibraltar by turns in order to give recreation and change to their ships' companies was regarded as a diplomatic untruth. The world had learned in 1931 that an announcement from Whitehall was likely to dissemble as long as possible and then to minimise.

The fact that the whole story of the Invergordon mutiny was never told—that there was no hint that the incident had its birth and being in anything but the imposition of pay cuts—left the nation, and the whole world, with the feeling that the Royal Navy had let the country down in a time of crisis. This feeling was accentuated by the self-congratulatory eulogies with which the British taxpayer was fed day after day. He tightened his belt, but he paid up cheerfully, and he was told day after day by the Press and by public speakers that his conduct was a wonderful example to the world. He puffed out his chest, and in so doing despised the more the men who, so he had been led to believe, had jettisoned

the greatest tradition in the world rather than bear a like sacrifice.

This attitude found expression in the responsible newspapers. The *Morning Post*, in a leading article entitled "Steady, Boys—Steady," wrote: "The British public, which sets its faith—and with reason—in the Royal Navy, must be disturbed and disappointed by the news from Invergordon. . . . It remains true, however, that the lower ratings of the Atlantic Fleet took this unjustifiable course of refusing duty as a means of drawing attention to their grievances. To use plain language, which is not fashionable nowadays, they committed a mutiny. . . . The Navy suffers a lowering of a great tradition by this refusal of duty." That leading article ended upon a particularly bitter note. "It is to be noted that there are practically no cases of men feeling their grievances so much as to ask for their discharge."

The Times came nearer to the feeling of the men themselves when it wrote: "The two most formidable protests which have so far arisen against the Government's plan come from the Navy and the teachers; but both appear to be protests against the application of the plan by the departments concerned rather than against the principle of contributing to avert a national danger."

It is perhaps a tribute to the sense of shock experienced by the British public that nowhere was any attempt made to analyse the situation.

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It was accepted that it was unbelievable that the Royal Navy should have gone on strike against cuts in pay, but the unbelievable had undoubtedly happened in that a section of the Royal Navy had mutinied. There the matter rested, and the belief that the cuts in pay were the sole cause of the disaffection was actively encouraged by the reticence of Whitehall.

There has, in fact, been a conspiracy of silence with regard to the mutiny at Invergordon. Not one Englishman in a million appreciates, or is even aware of, the fact that the mutiny at Invergordon had its place in a long series of events which had been carefully planned and fostered by agents working for revolution who seized upon the opportunity afforded by inept administration. Had the public known this there would not have been, as there certainly was, a general desire that the Navy should be punished for misdeeds for which it was considered solely and wholly responsible. A Cabinet Minister would not have said that if he had been in charge of the Navy, the sailors would have been disciplined for an example and the Fleet would have been sent to sea, instead of allowing them to sovietise the British Navy. Blame would not have been distributed wholesale to men who had acted with wisdom and resolution and had saved the nation from even greater calamity. There would not have been the necessity for scapegoats.

The anger of the nation would have been directed

rather against those upon whom the ultimate responsibility really rested—the powers behind the subversive forces which were working always for disintegration; which had achieved other mutinies in other Services; and which, when it finally failed in its assault upon the morale of the British Navy, fell back upon a campaign of causing material damage by sabotage in the Royal Naval Dockyards. Public opinion would have demanded that an end be put to policies which involved friendliness with the forces of disruption to the point of inviting them to take their places in walks of British national life best suited to their policy of spreading the toxin of disintegration. There would then have been an increase in British strength which would have made much more satisfactory the course of recent history.

Meanwhile the Navy would have been helped in the task of getting everything shipshape once again and building up anew the great tradition of service and reliability. There would have been no judgments until all the evidence had been thoroughly sifted and every shade of responsibility determined. There would have been punishment, but it would have been dealt out fairly to those who had earned it. There would have been no vindictiveness, no crying for scapegoats, and no hiding behind the backs of others.

Abroad the truth would have had an equally important effect. The deep-rooted feeling that the personnel of the British Navy was fundamentally

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unsound would not have appeared. There would not have been that readiness to believe rumours of British naval unrest which has manifested itself ever since the Invergordon mutiny, and these rumours themselves would probably not have arisen. If they had started they certainly would not have received the wide circulation and credence which they have done.

Six years have passed without the whole truth of the Invergordon affair being told, and without any attempt to place that incident in its true perspective. Now, from the material point of view, the British Navy is fast becoming a more important factor in world affairs. Many of the policies which helped to build up in the Royal Navy the psychology in which mutiny became a possibility, and which gave the greatest assistance to agitators, have been reversed. As a result, the morale of the naval personnel is better to-day than it has been for many years. But the stigma remains, particularly in the minds of foreigners, and this tends to reduce the value of the part which the British Navy can play in world affairs.

There can be no justification of mutiny, but there can be great reduction of the effects produced by mutiny if the happenings themselves are accurately given and placed in their true relation to each other and to cause and effect.

II

THE NAVY NEGLECTED IN PEACE

LOOKING back upon the history of the Great War, it is apparent that the greatest achievement of those years was not a battle or strategic operation, but the high morale and ever growing efficiency of the Grand Fleet. This was the major operation of the whole war, for it was the pressure exerted by the Grand Fleet which found the cracks in the enemies' armour. It was the collapse of morale in the German High Seas Fleet which brought about the *débâcle*, and it was the high efficiency, incessant watchfulness, and high morale of the British Navy which gave to the German Navy the feeling of hopelessness which made mutiny possible.

The retention of the morale of the Grand Fleet at so high a level in the face of superlatively unpleasant conditions and constant and repeated disappointment, and the continued increase in the efficiency of that Fleet, is a measure of the true stature of that great little man, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe. He himself perhaps realised that it was in harbour rather than at sea that he had achieved the most valuable victories for his country, for he took as the place name for his title the name of that dreary roadstead in the Orkneys—Scapa Flow. Lord Beatty, when he assumed

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command of the Grand Fleet, found councils and organisation of perfection which worked smoothly in practice.

It is difficult to appreciate the true magnitude of the task of upholding the morale and efficiency of the Grand Fleet under the conditions of war for more than four weary years. Everybody knows that it is more difficult to be cheerful in a cold, dreary winter than in summer sunshine. In Scapa Flow the winters are long. There was a danger that they might seem interminable. Moreover, the winters are colder, more dreary, more severe, than those to which the vast majority of the men were accustomed.

In the German High Seas Fleet there was, in normal times, one squadron in harbour close to a town, which gave change and recreation. Not so with the Grand Fleet. Leave was scarce, and the long journey back to the North gave ample time for reflection upon the bitterness of a man's lot.

Routine had to be kept up, otherwise efficiency would have suffered. Yet routine had to be varied wherever possible. It had to be presented in such a way that in itself it would provide change and recreation. Tens of thousands of men were living cheek by jowl with one another in the steel ships. These were the conditions under which men are apt to take unreasoning dislikes to one another; in which a particular rivet in the deck close above a man's hammock may become the focus of insensate

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hatred. If such things happen, there is danger. The least spark may ignite the trail that leads to mutiny.

In the Grand Fleet there were other factors which, under a lesser administration and with more volatile material, might have proved fruitful cause of disaffection. There was the constant need of carrying out gunnery and other exercises so that the fighting efficiency of ships, squadrons, and the whole fleet was not only maintained, but progressed. There were the frequent "sweeps" of the North Sea, carried out for the most part in vile conditions of weather. Most important of all was the attitude of the enemy. As months dragged into years and "sweep" followed "sweep," with never a smudge of hostile smoke being sighted on the horizon, men began to realise that only a combination of chance and magnificent staff work would ever lead to the opportunity of battle. In face of such a realisation, and the knowledge that the people at home were regarding their one meeting with the enemy as a disaster, there was danger of a feeling of hopelessness and uselessness among officers and men. Coupled with this was the danger of slackness. Men might well have thought that there was no purpose in the discomfort of steaming in bad weather, with extra lookouts and with guns' crews always at their guns, when it was almost a foregone conclusion that they would find no enemy. Almost—but not quite. The odd chance was wisely kept in the immediate foreground and greatly magnified. The result

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was that not only did the spectre of unrest never show itself, but that every one of those tens of thousands were constantly "on their toes" at the very peak of efficiency.

At first sight it would appear that, after having weathered such a storm, disaffection and mutiny in times of peace is the more inexplicable and inexcusable.

Yet after the war there were many influences working, consciously and unconsciously, towards a spirit of unrest, and the cohesion and unity of effort demanded by war had been removed.

"*Après la guerre* there'll be a good time everywhere." The words of the war-time music-hall song typified the spirit pervading all the fighting forces so soon as war weariness had supplanted the early spirit of adventure. To this hope there was a colossal anti-climax. The signing of the armistice did not mean that war was necessarily at an end. Yet it was regarded in this light by the men of every fighting Service. They heaved a deep sigh and prepared to enjoy all those things which had been denied to them for four and a half long years—only to find that they were kept with the colours. Everywhere there was unrest. In many military camps, both at home and abroad, there were outright mutinies. Mutinous soldiers refused to return to France, commandeered trains to take them to London, and even stormed the War Office itself.

Military demobilisation was hastened in order to

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deal with these crises by the simple means of removing at one stroke the major grievances and the collectivity which made the voicing of the grievances dangerous.

But the Navy held on. There were still big jobs to be done. The war had left the seas strewn with mines. The main war might have come to an end, but peace could not take its place so long as there were everywhere these threats to the peaceful occupation of sailors.

Mine clearance was organised and went on apace. The men employed on this dangerous work were volunteers and were highly paid on a special scale. They were also given greater privileges as regards leave than sailors with the Fleet. There is irony in the fact that these men received pay over and above that which had been received by them and others when embarked upon the even more dangerous task of waging war. In the Navy this irony was not appreciated. The men were volunteers, risking their lives when others did not. It did, however, serve to make the Navy more money-conscious. This did not mark the rise of commercialism in what has always been an idealistic Service. It was the inevitable reaction to economic necessity dictated by the changes wrought by war.

The process began during the war, when shortage of labour became so acute that enormous wages were paid to munition workers. An able seaman serving with the Fleet during the first three years of the

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war received 1s. 8d. a day, to which might be added allowances for good conduct badges and for holding a specialist rating in gunnery, torpedo, or some other branch. But allowances at that time were small. In those days a man with three good conduct badges—representing thirteen years of good and faithful service—found their combined financial worth to be 3d. a day. Yet this same man might have a daughter sixteen years of age who was earning as much as £6 a week. Admittedly the seaman was “all found” and the munition worker was not, but the living conditions in the Navy in war-time certainly did not represent the difference. Moreover, the sailor got no “day off” and was not paid overtime when he was on duty for more than a certain number of hours a day. The sailor’s pay meant twenty-four hours a day when necessary. It was obvious that things were out of joint—that the longer service and the greater hardship and danger should be the lower paid.

As in the case of the pay cuts which were the immediate cause of the Invergordon mutiny, it was not the question of money itself which had a profound effect upon the sailor. Rather was it the consequences, real or fancied, of the money question upon his wife and family.

During and immediately after the war the swollen wages paid ashore compared with naval pay affected the man of the Navy only indirectly by their influence upon his family life. This was profound.

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Four and a half years before, when he had been mobilised, he had left a home in which he was the most important person because he was the principal wage-earner. Now he came home on leave to find his position in the home in jeopardy. No longer was he the principal wage-earner. The pittances which he had been able to send home, and his marriage allowance, seemed insignificant beside the Friday night envelopes of others. It was useless for him to talk of the advantages of permanent employment and the prospect of a pension. The world was living in the present and cared nothing for the future. Besides, was there any guarantee that his employment would be so permanent? The war was over. Would there be any further need for a Navy or for him? And in any case the cost of living had soared, and his pay, which was still at the 1917 level, very slightly above the level of 1914 (for an able seaman the pay was 1s. 10d. a day as opposed to 1s. 8d. a day in 1914), showed no signs of increasing.

Naturally, it took a considerable time for the consequences of these rapid changes ashore to become generally felt in the Navy. Even though the armistice had been signed, leave was by no means plentiful. Besides, there was still war in various parts of the world. The armistice had stopped little but the fighting on the Western Front.

But they did become felt in the Navy, and they

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contributed largely to the causes of the manifestations of unrest which occurred shortly after November 11th, 1918. It must be remembered that the extraordinary differences between the rewards of the man in the Navy and the men and women employed on "the Home Front" were not narrowed by any scaling up of Naval pay for nearly three months after the armistice. The difference did narrow after the armistice, but this was because there was a cessation of the payment of wildly inflated wages. Wages ashore, however, still remained far higher than the pre-war level.

The cost of living, too, was far above that of 1914. Yet the pay of the officers and men of the Royal Navy remained, until February 1919, practically at the scale in force before the war.

It must be conceded that during the time when these rapid changes of values on shore had been taking place, the Admiralty had been exceedingly busy, first in winning the war, and then in clearing up the mess which it had left behind it. The pay of the Royal Navy, which had been revised in 1917 so that an able seaman got 1s. 10d. a day instead of the 1s. 8d. a day of 1914, was not again revised until February 1919. In this evidence of the workings of a fixed system applied to individuals who are of necessity affected by changes in the sensitive economic machinery of the modern world one detects a fundamental unsoundness which must always be liable to recur in times of stress.

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When the rates of naval pay were revised on February 1st, 1919, they were scaled up, so far as direct pay was concerned, by approximately 120 per cent on the pre-war scale. But by that time the cost-of-living index had soared to about 250—100 being the pre-war datum. In addition, certain allowances were increased, notably that for good conduct badges, which became worth 3*d.* apiece instead of 1*d.*

Thus an able seaman having less than three years' service in that rating, and without any good conduct badges (the first badge cannot be gained until a rating has served for three years' "man's time") received, under the revised scale of 1919, 4*s.* a day—28*s.* a week. This rate of naval pay was operative in 1922—the first year for which Ministry of Labour statistics are available. These show that in that year a seaman in the mercantile marine got 20*os.* a month—50*s.* a week, shipbuilding labourers were earning 39*s.* 1*d.* a week, engineering labourers 40*s.* 3*d.*, building trade labourers 53*s.* 4*d.* Stevedores who handled general cargo in the docks received 11*s.* 7*d.* a day. Yet the naval able seaman is, in the vast majority of cases, a far more skilled workman than any labourer.

It might have been thought that this scaling up of naval pay would have set matters right and put a stop to the lowering of morale which became apparent so soon as the strain of war was lifted. It certainly removed many grievances, but it did

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not have the effect of arresting the decline in morale and raising it once again to the highest levels.

Many factors were responsible for this. Although the pay had been raised the sailor did not, in a great many cases, return to his proud position of being the mainstay of his family. Women had found in war a pass-key into practically every walk of life. The coming of peace closed few of the doors against them. Women had become careerists, earning money at least as good as that proportion of a sailor's pay which could be sent home. In spite of the fact that the sailor is virtually "all found," he must, in a modified form, keep up two establishments. Moreover, he richly deserves "the blessings of the land" whenever there is opportunity to go ashore, and the recreation offered in seaports is not to be had for nothing.

Added to this feeling of inferiority there was arising a new sense of uncertainty. In a world of bewildering change even the Royal Navy did not seem to offer such permanence of employment as heretofore.

The British sailor is intensely proud of the Service. This pride, although inarticulate, is one of the greatest forces on the lower deck. It is based upon a tradition of complete supremacy over the navies of all other Powers. One might almost say that the sailor, even to-day, lives and thinks in terms of the old two-Power standard. This is not conceit, either individual or collective. It is partly tradition, and it

concerns material as well as personnel. Every new ship which enters the Service is the subject of long discussion on the mess decks of all ships. Good points are weighed against bad until a shrewd judgment is arrived at by the most exacting of all maritime tribunals. And judgment, once passed, is never rescinded. The 10,000 ton "Washington" cruisers of the *Kent* class are a case in which the decision of the lower deck was unfavourable. These ships have continued to be unpopular in spite of the spacious comfort of their living-quarters. They have even been dubbed "coffin ships" on account of their lack of armour protection.

But, thanks to British designers and shipbuilders, adverse judgments are rare. More often than not a ship is voted good and the next of her class awaited with interested impatience.

At the end of the war there were many ships of which to be proud—and one or two to laugh at. Of the former, the battleships of the *Queen Elizabeth* class and the cruisers of the *Hawkins* class stood out. But the battleships were soon outdone by the arrival of H.M.S. *Hood*. And it was known that there were four "improved *Hoods*" on the stocks.

With the coming of peace there was an immediate cessation of building. Month after month ships steaming up Portsmouth harbour passed the half-built hull of H.M.S. *Effingham* (a large cruiser of the *Hawkins* class) rusting and neglected on the slipway. It was the same at practically every port in the British

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Isles. It may seem to some that the sailor is hypersensitive, but it must be remembered that to the seaman a ship is a live thing, not a soulless mass of steel. The spectacle of continued neglect had its effect upon morale.

There was also the personal point of view conjured up by this cessation of shipbuilding. The sailors knew very well that with the coming of peace a large amount of old and obsolete tonnage must inevitably go to the scrap-heap. If building was stopped and half-built ships abandoned there would be no new ships commissioning to take the place of the old; and if there were no new ships there would be no need for sailors. There would have to be reductions far greater than the mere demobilisation of men entered "for the duration" and of reserves. Careers did not seem so certain after all.

As if to confirm this, there followed the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty on February 6th, 1922. Under its provisions no less than twenty capital ships were to be destroyed, and the partly built hulls of those four "improved *Hoods*" were to be dismantled.

The uncertainty as to the future which was beginning to be felt in the Navy was by no means confined to the men. The officers felt it too. This in turn increased the feeling of uncertainty on the lower deck, for the British sailor is uncanny in his ability to sense the feelings of his officers.

The officers had good reason for uneasiness. Some months after the signing of the Washington Treaty the "Geddes axe" fell. More than 1,200 lieutenants and lieutenant-commanders found themselves uprooted from their chosen career and thrust into an unfriendly and unfamiliar world with no armour but a small gratuity and an even smaller pension.

A lieutenant of two and a half to three years seniority and at least seven years' service actually at sea received a gratuity of £650 and a pension of £60 per annum. As if to show the desire of the Government to be rid altogether of these officers, special regulations were framed to allow them to commute the whole of their tiny pensions. In the vast majority of cases this was done, since the gratuity of itself was no passport into civil life—and in a very large number of cases both gratuity and commuted pension were lost.

The general feeling of uncertainty rose. Then it decreased a little. After such a wholesale reduction surely those left would be safe? But reports began to filter through of how some officer had invested his gratuity in an orange farm and lost it, of how another had bought himself a job, only to find it crash under him. Officers were being left penniless. It was all completely foreign to the tradition of the Service during the past century.

On the lower deck all this uncertainty about the future, although it was deeply felt, did not become

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a matter of first importance to every man until 1930. Up till that time there were no lack of jobs for those who left the Navy. New trades, such as the radio business, attracted large numbers, and, under boom conditions, the prospects after discharge were good. But when the slump came all that was changed. Unemployment figures soared. Jobs ashore were known to be hard to come by. Complete faith in his career became a matter of supreme importance to every man. Then it was that all the uncertainty which had been built up during the post-war years crystallised. Moreover, the gospel that the Great War had been a war to end war was bearing fruit. The League of Nations was still in repute. Neither Germany nor Japan had left it. The theory that armed force was unnecessary seemed as if it really were tenable.

As if to prove it, there followed the London Naval Conference of 1930. The Prime Minister of England, having declared that "Our Navy is us," proceeded to run counter to the advice of his expert advisers, ignore the statements of Lord Jellicoe and Lord Beatty that seventy cruisers was the minimum requirement for the security of the British Empire, and shackle the British Navy for six years to standards which made the task of the Navy impossible. There was not an officer or man in the Royal Navy who did not realise that he had been betrayed by the politicians. There was not an officer or man but realised that, should war come suddenly,

his fate was likely to be that of the men of Admiral Craddock's gallant squadron at Coronel. Small wonder that the Navy lost faith.

Moreover, more actual hardship was imposed where it had been known that hardship already existed. This was in the matter of leave and the proportion of service at home to that on foreign stations. The personnel of the Navy was reduced by a further 2,472 in the Navy Estimates issued shortly after the signing of the London Naval Treaty. At the time of the armistice in November 1918 there were, excluding reserves and personnel enlisted only "for the duration," 188,537 officers and men in the Royal Navy. At the end of 1931 there were less than 90,000. This reduction in personnel gives a far more accurate picture of the post-war reduction of the Royal Navy than any statistical tables of tons and guns. At the end of 1931 there were 56,380 fewer officers and men than in August 1914, just before the outbreak of war.

This reduction below the pre-war strength may give a somewhat false impression. Such has been the increase in the complication of ships and naval armaments that every ship to-day has a very much larger complement of men than the equivalent ship of pre-war days. For instance, the average battleship crew in 1913 was 900. Now it is more than 1,300. It is only by the number of ships that are in commission and their complements that the proportion of foreign service time to home

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station time can be calculated. The combination of larger crews and fewer men meant that, so soon as the Royal Navy reverted to "peace routine," with squadrons distributed all over the world, there was a far larger proportion of the total personnel serving abroad than in pre-war years.

In those days a man could more or less rely upon a commission at home following upon a commission abroad. Moreover, between every commission he could look forward to several months at least in his depot. A commission on a foreign station meant a period of from two to two and a half years without seeing his family. But on a commission at home a man was seldom away from home for more than three months at a time, and leave was granted three times a year. Moreover, when in his depot a man would receive the usual leave three times a year, and in addition he would be able, provided his family lived in or near the port, to spend with them three nights out of every four.

But the post-war reductions in personnel changed all that. It became no rarity for a man to be drafted to a ship on a foreign station only a few months after his return from a commission abroad. Time in the Atlantic Fleet, which was a home station in everything but name, was cut down to a maximum of one year—half the normal commission. This was done by an arrangement whereby one-third of the crew of a ship of the Atlantic Fleet was changed every four months. Time in the naval depots,

instead of being a regular period of more congenial conditions, became a tantalising lottery. Sometimes men would be drafted to the Royal Naval Barracks in one of the manning ports only to be drafted away to a ship almost immediately. Sometimes a man stayed in the depot only a few hours, sometimes a few days, but seldom more than a very few weeks. The old naval prayer about returning to enjoy the blessings of the land became a mockery, for the blessings, richly earned by long service abroad, were so often snatched away just as they came within grasp.

This was inevitable in face of the extent to which reduction in personnel was carried. It is impossible to arrange the manning of a fleet upon a basis of fair rotation of foreign service with home service and periods in the depots unless the Royal Naval Barracks are a reservoir of man-power not actually required for ships at any given moment. The reductions almost entirely eradicated this reserve of men.

That the over-reduction in man-power was causing great drafting difficulties in the Navy and imposing considerable hardship on the personnel was stated publicly on more than one occasion. Even after the numbers allowed to the Royal Navy had begun to increase, Viscount Monsell, then Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell and First Lord of the Admiralty, drew the attention of the House of Commons to the hardship inflicted by shortage of men.

When introducing the Navy Estimates to the

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House of Commons on March 12th, 1934, he said: "The increase in vote A (numbers of naval personnel), which will increase what we call our margin, is going to make a great difference in the comfort of the men. It will mean, first of all, that they will not have to be moved about from ship to ship as much as they have been, and, besides that, there will be a better distribution of shore and sea service and foreign and home service."

Apart from the hardship inflicted upon the men, shortage of personnel had an important deleterious effect upon the morale, particularly of the Atlantic Fleet. The battleships of the Fleet each carried more than 1,200 men. Four hundred of these left the ship every four months and were replaced by 400 men from elsewhere. The system resulted in the crews never settling down into a unified body. Officers found that it was almost impossible, in face of these constant changes, to build up in the ships an efficient organisation having as its foundation pride of ship and *esprit de corps*. So widespread were complaints that this system was eventually almost done away with. But the harm had been done. One can hardly wonder that it was in the Atlantic Fleet, composed of ships with crews made up largely of men who felt that they were being defrauded of the full period of home service due to them, and who were prevented by the system from settling down and gaining *esprit de corps*, that the seeds of disaffection took root.

THE NAVY NEGLECTED IN PEACE

Shortage of personnel imposed, in other ways, hardships upon the men of the Navy. During the period when numbers were at their lowest there was more than one case in which there were insufficient men in a manning depot to form a crew for a ship due to commission. Men, therefore, had to be drawn from the other depots to make up the crew. This was running counter to the whole system of entry and manning in the Navy. This is based upon port divisions. When a man enters the Navy he chooses the port division to which he will belong. Thereafter he forms part of the crews of ships manned from that port, and when he returns from abroad he passes through that depot. A ship is normally manned from one port, and this becomes her "home port," to which she returns after every commission or cruise. The home port is not only the home of the ship, but it normally contains the homes of most of the crew. The return of a ship to her home port, therefore, means that the men are within easy reach of their families, and can visit them when on short leave with the minimum of expense. But the manning of ships from all three ports, which was found to be necessary owing to shortage of men, meant that the home port of the ship was not the home port of a large proportion of the crew. These men, therefore, lost an advantage which others possessed. It was regarded as a breach of the conditions under which men entered the Navy.

Few people realise the extent of the shortage of

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men produced by the reductions between the end of the war and 1931. By 1935, when there arose the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean consequent upon the Italo-Ethiopian quarrel, the personnel of the Navy had been increased by 4,396 over the lowest. Yet, when more destroyers were needed in the Mediterranean, they could only be manned by paying off other ships. At one period during that crisis no less than five of our total force of fifteen capital ships were lying in the dockyards—immobile because there were no men available to man them.

There is no doubt that the promotion system for officers of the Royal Navy also tended towards a lowering of morale, not only for the officers themselves, but throughout the Service. Promotion from lieutenant-commander to commander was—and still is—entirely by selection from officers in a certain zone of seniority in the rank of lieutenant-commander. This zone has recently been considerably widened. In the days before the Invergordon mutiny it was from three to six years. That is, a lieutenant-commander with three years' seniority in that rank could begin to wonder whether his name would appear in the half-yearly list of promotions, but if he reached a seniority of six years without being promoted he knew that his career was finished. No matter what efforts he made, he could never be promoted. It was the end of all ambition, yet it was not the end of his service.

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In the years between the end of the Great War and 1931 an officer could be "passed over" at the age of thirty-five. He then had nothing to look forward to but ten years of service in second-class appointments—deterioration leading to retirement at forty-five on the maximum pension for his rank.

Naval officers have, by training, a sense of duty seldom equalled in any other walk of life. But they are human, and hopelessness will wear away efficiency as water will wear away stone.

On an average, during the eight years following the great "Geddes axe" and preceding the mutiny at Invergordon, fifty lieutenant-commanders were promoted each year, and each year more than a hundred lieutenant-commanders were "passed over." Thus the numbers of these "passed over" officers was enormous. In 1933 it was 354. Practically every ship larger than a destroyer carried at least one such officer. In every port there were collections of Reserve Fleet ships officered almost entirely by officers who had been "passed over" for promotion—naval rubbish—heaps of old and rotting ships and men robbed of hope.

The reactions of the lower deck to such a state of affairs were inevitable. Sailors officered, even in part, by those bearing the official brand of failure cannot be expected to be a smart and seamanlike body of men strong in resistance to seditious propaganda.

And, as will be seen, this propaganda was being

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ceaselessly disseminated. Those who served the cause of disruption and revolution knew their business. They made the most of the opportunities afforded to them, and they were quick to see a chance of profit in the uneasy conditions produced throughout the Navy by the painful processes by which an institution resentful to change sought to adapt itself to the requirements of a world wrongly regarded as new.

III

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THE signing of the armistice with Germany in November 1918 brought to an end the fighting in the main theatres of war. In retrospect it seems that the sudden collapse of Germany must have come as a complete surprise. Otherwise it is hard to reconcile the ending of the main war with the fact that Allied forces were called upon to continue hostilities long after the main armistice had been declared. In numerous theatres of war Allied forces were left almost entirely "in the air." The return of peace was being celebrated at home. Yet for these forces there was no peace—only a continuation of war conditions; confusion as to the issues involved made worse confounded by the apparent total lack of coherent policy.

Thus it was around most of the coasts of what to-day is Soviet Russia. Russia had for long been our ally. Yet 1918 saw our forces regarding the Russians as a sort of unofficial enemy. From the White Sea to the Black there were operations against the new Bolshevik regime in Russia. Designed in the first place to prevent the transfer of all German troops from the Eastern to the Western front, these operations were at first very successful in their main objective. Yet the coming of the

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armistice found these "side-shows" in a condition from which it was impossible immediately to withdraw with safety.

The message sent by the War Office to General Ironside at Archangel in April 1919 and repeated to General Maynard at Murmansk—five months after the armistice—is eloquent:

"Although you are cut off from your country by the sea, you are not forgotten. Your safety and well-being, on the contrary, is one of the main anxieties of the War Office, and we are determined to do everything in our power to help you and bring you safely home. You were sent to North Russia to help draw off the Germans from attacking our armies in France, and undoubtedly last year you helped to keep large numbers of German troops away from the battlefield and so enable a decisive victory to be won. Whatever may be the plan of action towards Russia decided by the League of Nations, we intend to relieve you at the earliest possible moment, and either bring the whole force away or replace you by fresh men. These reliefs are being prepared now, and will come through the ice to your aid at the earliest possible moment when the ships can break through. Meanwhile your lives and your chance of again seeing your home and friends and your fellow countrymen, who are looking forward to giving you a hearty welcome, depend absolutely upon your discipline and dogged British fighting qualities. All eyes are upon you now, and

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you represent the British Army which has fought and won and which is watching you confidently and earnestly. You will be back home in time to see this year's harvest gathered in, if you continue to display that undaunted British spirit which has so often got us through in spite of heavy odds and great hardships. Only a few more months of resolute and faithful service against this ferocious enemy and your task will have been discharged. Carry on like Britons fighting for dear life and dearer honour, and set an example in these difficult circumstances to the troops of every other country. Reinforcement and relief are on the way. We send you this personal message with the most heartfelt wishes for your speedy, safe, and honourable return."

This somewhat poetical tonic is the more noteworthy because it demonstrates that morale in our forces in North Russia was badly in need of stiffening and that there was a complete absence of clear-cut policy in Whitehall. Although this remarkable document emanated from the War Office and was addressed to the military commanders in North Russia, it must be remembered that the British Navy was also deeply involved in those regions in "an enterprise which, though taken from sound military reasons during the German War, threatened us with the gravest embarrassments after it had closed." We have it on the authority of Sir Henry Wilson, the then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that in the early part of 1919

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“discontent in the Army, Navy, and Air Force was rife, and was being exploited to the utmost by political agitators for their own mischievous ends.”

The operations against the Bolsheviks, particularly in North Russia and the Baltic, are important because it was during these operations that the British forces first came into direct contact with the full force of subversive propaganda. This was partly due to the action of the authorities in raising troops which were “a heterogeneous assortment of all nationalities . . . never of high quality.” The words are those of the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who went on to point out that they were also “tired, dispirited, home-sick, and inclined to be mutinous; their morale is undoubtedly so low as to render them a prey to the very active and insidious Bolshevik propaganda which the enemy are carrying out with increasing energy and skill.”

Low morale was hardly to be wondered at, considering that the forces concerned had had to winter in a climate where temperatures many degrees below zero and frequent snow blizzards prevailed. Moreover, they were bitterly aware that at home all was rejoicing at the coming of peace. They alone were left—isolated, to prosecute a policy which was not clear to its advocates, and which was condemned by a very large section of public opinion in England. They felt

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increasingly as time went on that they were being defrauded of the joys of victory and being left to their fate because the politicians could think of no means of withdrawing them while saving their own faces.

It is curious, in view of the apparent cognisance of Whitehall regarding the virulence of seditious propaganda emanating from the Bolsheviks, that the British authorities in North Russia should form units from deserters and the inmates of the prisons. Yet General Ironside formed a corps from these sources, and it was afterwards established that the Bolsheviks were getting agents into the forces by the simple process of their desertion from their own ranks or their appearance in the prisons of Archangel. These troops were known as the Slavo-British Legion and were officered largely by British officers.

On July 7th, 1919, the 1st Battalion of these troops—known as Dyer's Battalion—mutinied. The men murdered three British and four Russian officers, and two British and two Russian officers were wounded. This mutiny left the British forces in a most precarious position, and disaster would almost certainly have followed had the Bolsheviks been ready to take advantage of it. That the mutiny had been engineered by agitators with the full knowledge and encouragement of the Bolsheviks was shown by the fact that the British gunboats on the River Dwina intercepted a number of wireless

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messages between the mutineers and the Bolshevik forces.

A fortnight later there was another serious mutiny in one of the Russian regiments serving with the Allies in North Russia. As a result of these mutinies it became necessary to attempt to stabilise all the North Russian fronts with solely British troops. To this end a battalion of Royal Marines was sent to stiffen the Allied cause at Murmansk. So bad was morale at that time, however, that even these Royal Marines indulged in mutiny—a mutiny so serious that it resulted in an involuntary retirement of all the Allied forces on that front.

During this time the Royal Navy in North Russia had remained loyal. This was partly due to the fact that few of the crews had wintered in the White Sea. Actually, the only case of naval mutiny in North Russia during 1919 was in the one vessel whose crew had, almost to a man, wintered in the White Sea. This was the gunboat *Cicala*. In June 1919 she was ordered to proceed up the River Dwina to take duty as advanced gunboat. This was an unpleasant task, because the ship was apt to come under machine-gun fire from the wooded banks as well as shell fire from the Bolshevik gunboats (whose guns had a longer range than ours) and from land batteries. Mines being floated down-river added to the unpleasantness. On this occasion the crew of H.M.S. *Cicala* refused to sail up-river. There were many minor grievances, such as bad food and lack of

bread, but the chief was that the duty of "advanced gunboat" was falling more on the *Cicala* and her sister ships than on the monitors. This was inevitable, since long range was essential and the gunboats had had the range of their guns increased by the cutting away of the gun-shields to allow of higher gun elevation.

The Senior Naval Officer dealt promptly with what might otherwise have developed into a serious mutiny. He sent his Chief-of-the-Staff to the *Cicala* to investigate, and with orders to make it clear that the ship would either sail up-river or be blown out of the river by British guns. The *Cicala* sailed, and there was no more trouble in the British naval forces on the Dwina. The men, however, were subject to perpetual exhortations to mutiny. Wireless messages were broadcast by the Bolsheviks at frequent intervals, all of which called upon the British sailors to murder their officers and join the cause of the "freedom of the proletariat."

In other sectors of this curious "unofficial war" with Russia somewhat similar events were taking place. In the Black Sea the French Fleet had to be hurriedly withdrawn owing to mutiny. In the Baltic the British naval forces showed discontent which manifested itself in the refusal of duty and in open mutiny.

In the Baltic matters were somewhat different, because the naval forces concerned were in better communication with the home country. The sailors

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read British newspapers, albeit they were a few weeks old—and were more swayed by events at home than by Bolshevik propaganda. Moreover, the British warships in the Baltic were manned almost entirely by men who had seen the coming of peace in their homeland. To some extent, therefore, their lot was the harder, for, having just won an official war, they were despatched to risk their lives under war conditions which were stressed as those of “peace.” The Baltic in 1919 was a mass of minefields. Moreover, British ships were torpedoed by Bolshevik submarines and fired on by Bolshevik warships. During 1919 in the Baltic the British Navy lost two destroyers and one submarine, as well as three coastal motor-boats in the raid on Kronstadt, while British cruisers were fired on by the Bolshevik heavy ships. The mine-sweepers were also frequently under fire when sweeping.

The men employed in these operations were well aware of the outcry in England against these new hostilities, which were not recognised as such by the Government. They received British newspapers, many of which bitterly condemned British action against the Bolsheviks. One influential British newspaper even went so far as to declare that our airmen in the Baltic were “worse than the Hun baby-killers who bombed London.” Nor were the men in any sense volunteers for these special operations. The reverse was the case. In the case of one cruiser detailed for the Baltic from Rosyth, men

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were hastily detailed from other ships in the port, thereby giving the latter an excellent opportunity of getting rid of undesirables.

In reply to a question in the House of Commons regarding discontent in the Baltic, the First Lord of the Admiralty stated that "the Navy is a voluntarily enlisted Service and everyone enlists for general service and to obey orders. I am not aware that there is any foundation for the suggestion that enlistment was made for service in any particular field of war. There has, unfortunately, been evidence of discontent, which the Board of Admiralty are inquiring into."

Evidence of discontent over service in the Baltic there was in plenty. In one ship ordered to sail for service in these waters the ship's company refused to coal. In another case men under sailing orders for the Baltic broke their leave and went to London. In October 1919 between thirty and forty sailors who had broken away from ships at Devonport under orders for the Baltic were arrested at Paddington Station.

In the Baltic itself there was plenty of danger, hard work, lack of leave, shortage of bread, and, above all, uncertainty. The latter was the chief cause of much of the discontent, and it was due directly to the equivocal policy of the Government in prosecuting a war the existence of which it refused to recognise.

One of the most fruitful causes of discontent was

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the question of pensions. The regulations regarding pensions for the dependants of naval officers and men lay down a special scale of pensions payable to the dependants of men killed in action in time of war. In the Baltic there was no war, yet men were losing their lives through direct enemy action. Officially, therefore, the higher scale of pensions did not appear to apply.

The more one studies the incidence of discontent on the lower deck in the Navy the more is one struck by the fact that one of the chief causes is almost invariably a conviction that hardship will fall upon the wives and families of the sailors. Here was a question which touched very deeply upon the families at home. It was constantly debated on the mess decks of every ship engaged in the "unofficial" hostilities against the Bolsheviks, and the more it was debated the greater became the uncertainty and the more serious the discontent.

In the Baltic it was not long before the discontent led to mutiny—a mutiny which came near to causing the wreck of a new cruiser and causing serious damage to another ship. H.M.S. *Vindictive* had been ordered to the Baltic in a hurry in June 1919. She was a cruiser fitted as an aircraft carrier—one of those queer compromises of type of which the British Navy had so many at the end of the Great War. The ship left the United Kingdom with about 1,000 ratings, the normal complement being under 700, and, after a call at Copenhagen, she grounded

badly off Reval, where she remained on a sandbank for nearly a week. Then she was employed in the Gulf of Finland, where aircraft bases were established ashore by her officers and men. Early in September the *Vindictive* returned to Copenhagen to embark stores and additional aircraft. Whilst there leave had to be cancelled owing to bad weather. This provided a sufficient spark to set ablaze the whole train of discontent which had been laid during the past months. Sailors mustered on the quarter deck and declared that their attitude was one of "no leave—no work." At first they refused the command to disperse, but did so when the situation was explained to them.

Worse was to follow. The wind rose, and it became imperative to move the ship to a different berth. As the anchor was being weighed a party of stokers shut off the steam to the fans providing the forced draught to the stokeholds. Fortunately a junior engineer officer (one promoted from the lower deck) saw this action and rectified matters. In order to do so he had to arm himself with a heavy spanner and, single-handed, drive the mutineers out of the fan-room. Had he not acted so promptly the pressure in the stokeholds would have dropped sufficiently to cause a "flash-back" of burning oil fuel from the furnaces, with disastrous results to the stokehold personnel and the ship. But even as the officer drove off the mutineers and restarted the great fans the steam pressure in the boilers fell away—and this just as the

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anchor was about to break out of the ground. Here a fortunate accident occurred. The anchor did not break out of the ground. It held in spite of the efforts of the capstan, and it was afterwards found to be foul of a mass of sunken wreckage. Had the mutinous stokers succeeded in stopping the fans altogether and had the anchor come up clear, there is no doubt that, in the gale which was blowing, H.M.S. *Vindictive* would have been wrecked upon the lee shore. And she would probably have carried with her to destruction another ship which was moored between her and the shore.

This mutiny, the continued uncertainty among the men of the real objects of the operations, and the sudden and early incidence of cold weather, making the achievement of any objective more than ever problematical, led the Senior Naval Officer in the Baltic to issue a memorandum to all ships. It was dated October 29th, 1919, and read as follows:

“I am anxious that ship’s companies should know the Baltic situation as it is at present.

“Every effort is being made by the Russian North-West Army, supported by the Estonians, to relieve Petrograd before winter sets in; by which time, if this is not done, it is certain that a very large proportion of the inhabitants will die of cold and hunger, as there is grave lack of fuel and food.

“The Germans, by every means in their power, and notably by attacking Riga and thereby drawing off Estonian troops from the Petrograd advance,

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are hindering this relieving operation; as it is their design to leave Petrograd in this state until the spring, so that by then its weakness leaves it an easy prey, and, having overwhelmed both Latvia (Riga and Libau) and Estonia, they intend to march on Petrograd and so dominate the whole of the Baltic, and finally Russia.

"Our role still is to keep order and prevent oppression in the Baltic until stable and humane Governments are formed by all peoples on its shores, and in particular now to strain every nerve before the ice sets in to get supplies of food into Petrograd of which there are ten thousand tons now loading at Viborg, only waiting until the forts, Krasnaya Gerka, Grey Horse, and Kronstadt, surrender, for our sweepers to sweep a passage through the mines to Petrograd and so save thousands of lives and bring peace and happiness once more to Russia.

"I have told the Bolsheviks at Kronstadt that I will spare their lives and give them peace and food if they will destroy or surrender their ships and send their representatives to me.

"I believe you will agree with me that, though after our own long war the nature of our service out here is hard and disagreeable and so many have well earned rest and happiness, yet our Navy has scarcely ever had a worthier aim or—if it succeeds—one which will bring those in it more honour and affection in the world, and particularly

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out here among the peoples who have been kept from oppression and saved from starvation; and so I ask you to help me to see it through with the same splendid staunchness that I have had from you all throughout my nine months' service out here, and I hope that what I have said will remove the perplexity which I well understand must be in many of your minds regarding our presence and action out here.

"In one word—we are the police of a very disturbed district, and our great hope is to end as the saviours of thousands of lives by winning our way through the minefields with food."

A police force, however, cannot be expected to give always of its best if it does not have the whole-hearted support and encouragement of its Government. Moreover, acting as a police force in a foreign, perplexing, and dangerous neighbourhood under conditions in which the only certainty is that others are enjoying themselves at home, is a task very apt to pall, however high the ideals involved. At that time there was a song which was sung by our forces in the Baltic. The last three lines ran:

Please excuse us if we swear
When you ask us where we've been—
"Policing" for the ruddy Finn!

The explanation of the Senior Naval Officer in the Baltic did not entirely dispel the discontent prevalent among those under his command.

In his flag-ship, H.M.S. *Delhi*, a section of the

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ship's company represented that while they were willing to carry out all ordinary peace-time duties, they would not work the ship if she was engaged upon any further actively hostile operations. This mutiny was dispelled without great difficulty.

In November 1919 there followed a further mutiny in the Baltic. If anything more than the closing in of the winter were required to prove that the rather tenuous objectives of the Baltic operations could not be attained, it was provided by this last mutiny, in which the men of the mine-sweepers refused to sweep under fire. There was some justification for this course. The mine-sweepers were manned by men who had volunteered for the Mine Clearance Service set up after the armistice. For this service the men received special rates of pay and certain privileges with regard to leave. But in volunteering they signed an agreement which expressly stated that they would not be required to take part in hostilities. Moreover, by November 1919 the period for which most of these men had volunteered had expired, and they desired to go home without further risking their lives in operations which seemed foredoomed to failure.

Those serving in the White Sea and the Baltic were by no means the only men among whom discontent was rife in 1919, nor were they the only ones exposed to seditious propaganda. At home, with less reason, there was almost as much discontent, and mutiny broke out on at least one occasion.

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Discontent manifested itself in the naval personnel almost as soon as the armistice had been signed. This was caused chiefly by those men who had been entered "for the duration" only. These expected, and even demanded, instant demobilisation on the signing of the armistice. They were unmindful of the fact that an armistice does not necessarily bring a war to a close, and imagined that they could "down tools when the whistle blows." Actually, the demobilisation of such ratings was hastened as far as possible, but it had to be a somewhat gradual process because of the large commitments of the Navy which did not end automatically on November 11th, 1918.

The discontent among the "hostilities only" ratings spread to many of the regular ratings. In their case the cause of discontent was not that they desired the immediate termination of their service, but that they desired long leave after the long strain of war—a desire which could only be gratified gradually and in rotation. There was also current at this time a belief that the British Government proposed to continue the war, not against the defeated central Powers, but against Russia. This led to rumours that men were being purposely kept at their stations in order to be ready to embark at a moment's notice upon the new war. These rumours were encouraged by those who wished to discredit the policy of the Government in embarking

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upon operations in the Baltic and continuing those in North Russia.

The question of pay was also a fruitful cause of discontent. The cessation of hostilities brought with it more opportunities for leave. Men came into closer contact with the situation obtaining ashore, and they were not slow to realise that they were miserably under-paid by comparison with the inflated wage scales ruling ashore. At this time the able seaman, who in October 1917 had been granted a rise of pay of 2*d.* per day, was still only drawing 1*s.* 10*d.* a day. A temporary adjustment in the scales of naval pay was made, but the men were a prey to uncertainty until February 1919, when the pay was raised so that an able seaman received 4*s.* a day. In addition to this, the financial worth of a good conduct badge was increased from 1*d.* a day to 3*d.* a day.

The Jerram Committee, which investigated conditions in the Royal Navy and recommended a scale of naval pay on a level comparable to the cost of living and scale of wages to be earned ashore, was set up on January 7th, 1919. Apparently further evidence was required, for, three days later the Commander-in-Chief at Plymouth allowed a meeting of ratings to take place in the Royal Naval Barracks with a view to forming resolutions to be forwarded to the Admiralty for consideration. All ratings of the lower deck were represented at this meeting, which was important for two reasons. It

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was interpreted in many quarters as giving official recognition to the right of combination on the part of the men of the Navy—a right which the Admiralty were most strenuously to deny a few years later. It also proved to be the forerunner of the Lower Deck Welfare Committees which served for many years to keep the Admiralty in touch with the feelings and desires of the men on the lower deck.

Subversive propaganda was being distributed at frequent intervals during the months following the signing of the armistice. The originators were obviously bent upon making the most of the general spirit of unrest and turning it to their own ends. They played their cards badly, however, and showed complete ignorance of the psychology of the British sailor. As an instance, one of the most prolific distributions of seditious propaganda took place in the dockyard ports in the spring of 1919. The literature took the form of a small leaflet which urged the men of the Royal Navy to combine with the dockyard workmen and seize the ships. Anybody with any knowledge of the Royal Navy is aware that there is never the slightest likelihood of a sailor combining with a dockyard workman. Moreover, at that time, the vast majority of the sailors had no desire whatever to seize a ship. They were tired of the ships, and were far more interested in the joys of the land.

Certain sections of the British Press were at this time taking a conscious or unconscious part in the

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spreading of propaganda calculated to foment discontent. There were plenty of news items at that time which drew attention to, and in some cases exaggerated, anomalies attendant upon the process of demobilisation and reduction.

Anomalies there certainly were. Some men were discharged earlier than others. Men who were anxious to be discharged were in some cases kept on after others who desired to stay on. There were several cases where the "exigencies of the service" entailed the retention of a man by a week or two—a week or two which made all the difference to being able to take up some particular appointment in civil life.

Perhaps one of the chief causes for resentment lay in the war gratuities paid to officers and men. Officers who held temporary commissions received war gratuities at a rate of 124 days' pay for the first year of service and 62 days' pay for each subsequent year or part of a year. These gratuities were paid irrespective of where the service had actually been performed, and were drawn in a number of cases by temporary officers who had never been to sea in the war area. The gratuities paid to men of the lower deck, however, varied according to whether the man's service had been ashore or afloat. Gratuities paid for the first year of service were £5 to an able seaman, £8 to a petty officer, and £12 to a chief petty officer. These payments for the first year of service were made irrespective of whether the service

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had been ashore or afloat, but for the gratuity payable for service subsequent to the first year there were two scales. One was for a man who had actually served at sea during the war. The other was for those who had not served at sea. The difference was considerable—the full war gratuity to an able seaman with sea service during the war was £29, while that to an able seaman who had been employed ashore was £17. Agitators made much of the fact that no difference was made in the case of officers.

When one considers the magnitude of the task of reduction and demobilisation with which the Admiralty was faced, and the difficulties imposed by continued operations abroad, it is surprising that far more glaring anomalies did not arise. By the end of June 1919 some 7,000 officers had been discharged. When the first "Peace" Navy Estimates were presented to Parliament at the beginning of December 1919, they provided for a total personnel of 275,000 officers and men. On November 15th, 1918, the total naval personnel, including reserves serving with the Fleet, amounted to 407,816 officers and men. In just over twelve months more than 132,000 officers and men had been demobilised.

Consideration of the influences at work during 1919 disperses any wonderment at the fact that this year produced a greater number of serious courts martial than any year in the history of the Royal Navy.

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The year 1919 was remarkable not only because of the many causes of disaffection, the discontent which was rife, and the mutinies which actually took place. It marked the beginnings of two movements which had been, up till then, unknown in the British Navy. On the one hand, there was among the men a growing consciousness that their views and actions could sway the authority by which they were ruled. This consciousness was increased to an immeasurable degree by the realisation, during the year 1919, that the supreme authority of Government was lacking in resolution and swayed by outside agitation. On the other hand, there was the acknowledgment on the part of the Admiralty that the men should have some say in the ordering of their own affairs. This was expressed first at Plymouth by the sanctioning of a representative meeting of the lower deck, and later by the establishment of Lower Deck Welfare Committees.

In the first place the Committees were called upon only to consider the equitable distribution of prize-money to ratings. Nevertheless, their institution was a milestone in the social history of the Royal Navy. The men of the lower deck were given opportunity of airing their views without fear of incurring displeasure or the more serious charges of insubordination, disaffection, mutiny, or the preferment of "frivolous requests." No longer did the manner in which a grievance was dealt with depend solely upon the temperament

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and outlook of a single officer. It received the cool consideration of a board.

In face of this new system, the establishment of higher rates of pay, and in view of the fact that the larger part of the post-war discharges had been effected, and that the worst of the "private wars" had been brought to an end, it might have been expected that discontent in the Royal Navy would have come to an abrupt end. It did not do so.

IV

GROWTH OF SOCIALIST INFLUENCES

WITH the appointment of the Welfare Committees those who did not know the lower deck might have been forgiven for thinking that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. But the British sailor was suspicious of this new Utopia. He had felt himself let down so often before, and, although the feeling had been more often than not without foundation, the memories of 1919 remained. In that year a large number of men had lost their lives in operations as good as repudiated by the Government by whom they had been initiated, and which had been proved by events to have been altruistic waste.

Nevertheless, discontent did decline—for a few months. During these months, however, there grew up in the Navy an increasing realisation of the power of collective action. This was not surprising. In the months following the signing of the armistice collective action and the trade union movement were acquiring a power in civil life which had not up till then been thought possible. The post-war Navy was in far closer touch with events ashore, due partly to the establishment of a higher educational standard, partly to the growing ubiquity of the Press, and partly to the fact that the need for

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economy kept the ships and their men more in Port.

The sailor began to realise that his fellow workers ashore could influence policy to their own advantage. While the sailor began by holding himself above such tactics, the observation of them had its effect. He came to realise that, in the event of glaring injustice, he could adopt the same course with fair prospect of success. Admittedly there was the Naval Discipline Act, with its provisions for "death or such other punishment," but events in civil life seemed to show a reluctance on the part of authorities to inflict punishment for fear of stirring up worse strife.

The first demonstration on the part of the lower deck came in the summer of 1920.

The Welfare Committee, by which so much store had been set, forwarded 287 recommendations to the Admiralty. On July 29th, 1920, the Admiralty announced their approval of two of these recommendations. This was a great anti-climax. The very next day a deputation consisting of twenty-one men representing the Inter-Port Welfare Committee presented a petition to the Admiralty. Earl Beatty, the then First Sea Lord, received this deputation. The interview lasted two and three-quarter hours, but it resulted in some adjustment of the claims put forward on behalf of the lower deck. Here was proof that concerted action by the men of the Royal Navy was, to some extent at least, effective. The men had

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broken away from the time-honoured naval custom of forwarding requests and complaints "through the proper Service channels," and had adopted the tactics used by the workers in industries ashore, and it seemed that such tactics had proved more rapidly effective than was usually the case with formal complaints put forward in the manner prescribed by tradition and the regulations. At once there grew up among certain elements in the naval personnel a feeling of closer affinity with workers ashore.

The sense of achievement was, however, short-lived. Ten days later the Naval Inter-Port Conference of Lower Deck representatives was summarily dissolved by order of the Admiralty.

This led to considerable dissatisfaction. It seemed that the one linking body between the sailors and the Admiralty was being thrown overboard a mere ten months after its inception. It also led to widespread rumours. It was said that this action had been taken by the Admiralty because the deputation of a few days ago had convinced the authorities that the men of the Royal Navy were becoming too powerful owing to the opportunity for concerted action afforded by the Inter-Port Lower Deck Conference.

It was also widely rumoured that the conference had been hastily dissolved on account of the imminence of war with Russia. Poland was struggling against the Soviet, and the altruists of England were vociferous in demanding armed intervention to save

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gallant little Poland from the grip of Bolshevism.

Both these rumours were fostered and made use of by the more discontented elements in the Navy and by outside agitators.

At that time there was a great public outcry over the ship *Jolly George*. This ship was loading munitions at the London Docks for the Polish forces fighting against Russia. In Parliament, Sir Robert Horne, President of the Board of Trade, admitted that he had issued a licence for the export of these arms. So many supplementary questions were asked that a miniature debate arose. Thereafter the outcry resulted in a strike of the dockers, and the munitions already loaded into the *Jolly George* had to be unloaded before peace was restored.

The threat of war passed away, however, and the granting of certain concessions to the men of the Royal Navy in accordance with some of the recommendations made by the original Inter-Port Welfare Conference resulted in calm being restored.

Nine months later, however, Great Britain was in the throes of a coal strike, and the Royal Navy was called upon to keep order and prevent sabotage at the pits. This duty fell not only upon regular naval ratings, but upon Fleet Reservists called up for the purpose. These men were in far closer touch with organised labour than were the regulars, and their sympathies were, on the whole, with the strikers. It was not surprising, therefore, that it was found necessary to replace the Reservists in the mining

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areas by regular naval ratings. This step was not taken before mutiny had broken out among the Reservists on strike duty.

On May 5th, 1921, the First Lord of the Admiralty, replying to questions in the House of Commons, made the following statement:

"A battalion of Fleet Reservists employed on military duty in the Newport, Monmouth, area, acting on an unfounded rumour that they were to be engaged on strike breaking, made a collective protest. The battalion was returned to Portsmouth, where the matter was investigated. It was explained to the men that they were only to be called upon against persons individually or collectively who break the law, and that they would be called upon to act only by request of the local civil authority. The men then expressed their readiness to resume duty wherever they may be required. As a result of this incident, Reservists in the mining areas are being replaced by regular naval ratings."

It is noticeable that during the whole of the post-war period the word "mutiny" was most carefully avoided in official quarters. "Incident," "collective protest," "unrest," "insubordination," "disaffection"—any term was used in preference to the blunt word "mutiny." This is not without significance. It reflected a weakness and reluctance to face facts in the highest official quarters—a policy which failed to deter the more turbulent spirits in the Fleet, and which found expression ten years

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later in the refusal of the Government to try mutineers for the offence of which they had been guilty. As will be seen, this refusal contributed to the causes of the great mutiny at Invergordon.

The actual happenings described by the First Lord of the Admiralty as a "collective protest" were as follows: No. 2, Portsmouth, Battalion of the Royal Fleet Reserve was stationed at Newport, Monmouth. Rumours, obviously circulated by agitators, had been current to the effect that the armed forces were to be used to break the strike if the workers continued in their refusal to return to work. On April 29th, after the dinner hour, the "Assembly" was sounded on the bugle at 1.15 p.m. Very few men obeyed the bugle call; the great majority remained in their messroom, and cheering broke out. The "Assembly" was again sounded, followed by the bugle call for the men to fall in "by divisions." This was greeted by derisive cheering. In all, about a hundred men out of the whole battalion obeyed the bugle calls.

The second-in-command of the battalion thereupon ordered the whole battalion to muster in the messroom. This the men did, and they were addressed by the Commanding Officer of the battalion. He told them that if they had grievances they were to fall in and select two representatives from each platoon from whom he could ascertain the grievances. He would then see what could be done to remove any causes of complaint.

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This plan was agreed to by the men, and the Commanding Officer received the representatives of the men, from among whom an able seaman had been selected spokesman. It appeared that most of the grievances were concerned with small complaints regarding leave, victualling, and hours of work. At last, however, one man asserted the real cause of the discontent. He pointed out that at least 90 per cent of the men were themselves trade unionists, and that they would throw down their arms if they were called upon to use them against their fellow workers on strike. This declaration was greeted by a general murmur of assent.

Here, for the first time, was evidence of the spread of trade unionism and its methods to the fighting Services.

On the following day the battalion was sent back to Portsmouth. The men, flushed with victory, became more and more disorderly. Looting of buildings took place before the departure of the battalion from Newport, and on its arrival in the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth there was further disorder, and the Red Flag was hoisted on the barracks flagstaff by the mutineers in place of the White Ensign. To prevent any further occurrences of this nature, a double colour guard had to be posted in the naval barracks.

Faced with the sudden incidence of the methods of organised labour among the men under his command, it is difficult to see what other action

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could have been taken by the Commanding Officer of this battalion of Reservists, without risk of causing a more serious outbreak. Yet the Commanding Officer was tried by court martial on a charge of "Neglect to the prejudice of good order and naval discipline in that he did not take proper measures to suppress an outbreak of insubordination in Portsmouth Royal Fleet Reserve Battalion No. 2 then stationed at Newport, Mon." The charge was proved and the accused "adjudged to be reprimanded."

The following year saw further large reductions in the personnel of the Royal Navy following upon the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty. These reductions were, of course, effected as the ships were paid off and scrapped. Thus the process of reduction began slowly, and gradually gathered momentum. It was not until the spring of 1923 that the discontent caused by these reductions crystallised and assumed serious proportions. Then the action taken by the men was "constitutional," in that the matter was brought to the notice of the Member of Parliament for one of the dockyard towns.

This method of approach is of interest in that it demonstrates the beginning of the feeling that Members of Parliament could do far more for the men than their own officers, however willing. It will be seen that during the next few years Members of Parliament succeeded in obtaining the redress of grievances where naval officers had failed. It was

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only natural that such a state of affairs should lead to a reduction in the confidence of the men in the power and ability of their officers.

The Member of Parliament for Devonport drew attention in the early spring of 1923 to the discontent being caused in the Royal Navy by the large numbers of men who were being compulsorily discharged. He read out a long question in the House of Commons, drawing attention to a number of grievances consequent upon the reductions in the naval personnel, pointing out the difficulties with which the men were faced when seeking employment ashore, and asking whether a higher rate of bonus could not be granted. Cries of "Order" arose at the length of the question, but the Member for Devonport retorted that the House should remember that the Navy fought for them in the Great War, and reminded members that when these men had enlisted in the Navy they had been promised security of employment and ultimate pension.

Some eight months later the need for economy led to the question of reductions of pay for the fighting Services being mooted. There was immediate and strong reaction in the Navy, and an appeal to Parliament was delivered through the medium of the Lower Deck Welfare Committees, which were once more in being. This appeal carried with it more than a hint of warning that trouble was likely to follow any reductions of pay. It was

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signed by the Chairmen of the Lower Deck Welfare Committees of the three Home Port Divisions of Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham, and sent to the Chairman of the Dockyard Committee of the House of Commons, who was the Member of Parliament for Devonport. The appeal was worded as follows:

“On behalf of the Petty Officers and men of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines we earnestly solicit the Committee to resist to the utmost of their power any attempts now being made or about to be made to reduce the rates of pay awarded by the Jerram Pay Committee to the Royal Navy in 1919. Any comparison with pre-war rates of pay should not be for a moment entertained, irrespective of the increased cost of living, because unfortunately it is a well-known fact that the mighty British Empire, both before and during the war, treated the naval personnel in a disgraceful manner as regards pay and allowances and on a standard immeasurably below that of the poorest paid British workman.

“The statement of the Jerram Committee about the adequacy of the 1914 rates is as untrue as it is unjust. The present rates were arrived at after an exhaustive inquiry in 1919, when they were considered a permanent adjustment.

“On behalf of the Lower Deck we do most earnestly request that members of the Dockyard Committee of the House of Commons will use their best endeavours to prevent a false financial economy

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being effected, with a subsequent loss of efficiency through the creation of a discontented naval personnel.

"The pay and conditions to-day are fair and just. We beg the Committee to retain them as such."

Here again were the Welfare Committees being used as a means of collective action. Moreover, the appeal, being addressed to a Parliamentary Committee over the heads of the naval authorities, and containing, as it did, outspoken criticism and a scarcely veiled threat, came perilously close to seditious insubordination. It was hardly surprising that the Admiralty took measures to warn the men of the Royal Navy against any tendency to assert the right to combination or to take collective action against authority with the object of bringing pressure to bear upon the Government.

The year 1924 marked a milestone in political history which was not without its effect upon the men of the Royal Navy. In February 1924, the first Labour Government took office. The power of Labour had reached the heights of Government.

During the General Election which had resulted in the Labour majority a number of sailors of the Royal Navy had taken an active part in assisting candidates. Although this had helped to swell the number of votes cast for Labour, it was recognised by the Labour Government to have set a dangerous precedent. On October 23rd, 1924, therefore, less than a fortnight before the Labour Government

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came to the end of its first short tenure of office, the First Lord of the Admiralty issued orders forbidding officers and men of the Royal Navy on full pay to prosecute actively in any way the interests of candidates in the coming General Election.

The rapid fall of Labour and the re-establishment of a Conservative Government was the signal for great activity among those of the extreme Left Wing, who saw a road to revolution and power in the seduction of the Armed Forces.

On January 11th, 1925, the Communist Party of Great Britain issued what were called the *Soldiers' Immediate Demands*. Among other things, this document demanded "the right to join Trade Unions, and to form Soldiers' and Airmen's Trade Unions," "the right to elect Regimental, Battalion, and Company Committees," "the right to join political parties and to organise branches of these parties in the Army," "no military intervention in industrial disputes," "no compulsory Church attendance," and "abolition of courts martial."

The trend of circumstances was indicated again in July, when a Labour Member of Parliament asked the First Lord of the Admiralty "whether statements relative to the remuneration of Naval personnel employed at or standing by for industrial work in connection with a strike of general nature or of strikes of a local nature, or industrial emergency due to threatened strikes, have been promulgated for guidance; whether he will state the nature

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of these statements; and whether arrangements are made in such cases for repayment by the firms or undertakings concerned for such services rendered."

The reply was to the effect that naval ratings always received extra pay for shore duties but that the order covering the subject was confidential, and persons obtaining any information which it contained would be liable under the Official Secrets Act. The First Lord of the Admiralty added that only such steps would be taken as seemed necessary in order to ensure that the food supply of the civilian population should remain intact in the event of any national disturbance.

At this time the call for economy again became urgent. Economy was urged upon officers and men of the Navy in order that the warship building programme could be continued. This was a prelude to the establishment of new scales of naval pay. Reductions were effected, but the warning of the Chairmen of the Welfare Committees of the year before was not ignored. There was a bitter fight between the Treasury and the Admiralty under Earl Beatty. The Admiralty won their point, and it was decided that the reduced rates of pay for the Royal Navy were only to apply to new entries, not to the men already serving. Thus there came into being two parallel scales of pay in the Navy. An able seaman already serving continued to be paid 4s. a day—the rate fixed early in 1919 by the Jerram Committee. But an able seaman who

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entered the Navy after October 4th, 1925, received only 3s. a day.

Meanwhile subversive propaganda was being carried out with great energy. In August the *Workers' Weekly* had published the following statement:

"Fourteen thousand copies of a circular which repeated the actual words for which our Editor, J. R. Campbell, was arrested last year have been distributed to workers sympathetic to the Communist Party. These circulars are being used as enclosures to personal letters from workers to their friends and relatives in the Forces. . . . Every member of the movement should get busy. Each can get in touch with at least one soldier, sailor or airman."

It was not long before official concern was shown at the quantity of subversive propaganda of this type being introduced into the Navy. On December 17th, Commanders-in-Chief at the Home Ports of Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham announced that the Admiralty had ordered that the following document was to be read to the crews of all ships, and copies posted up in ships and naval shore establishments:

"It has come to the notice of the Admiralty that an endeavour is being made to stir up discontent on questions of pay by distributing an inaccurate and misleading leaflet to fictitious people in the Naval Service. This leaflet hints that the recent

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reductions in the pay of new entries is a step towards reducing the existing rates. This is untrue and has no foundation on fact. The statement that the daily table allowance of officers is equal to the daily pay of the men is also untrue. The officers' victualling allowance is the same as that of the men. The writers of this leaflet are not really interested in the pay or welfare of the lower deck. Their aim is to cause discontent so as to facilitate their real object, which is to introduce by revolutionary violence a form of government similar to that which brought nothing but bloodshed and misery and starvation to Russia." The document went on to point out that the originators of the pamphlet well knew that they could never achieve their object so long as the Services remained loyal, and that it was for this reason that they were using every endeavour to undermine that loyalty.

Subversive propaganda did, however, have some effect among certain ratings in that it made mutiny seem to be the logical result of grievances. It was so in H.M.S. *Vindictive* at Portsmouth. The strict discipline of an officer, and his insistence that the men should always be properly dressed regardless of occupation, was said to be the immediate cause of the mutiny. There was grumbling on the mess decks, and then one day a young rating waved a red handkerchief. Some of the men immediately sang "The Red Flag." Order was quickly restored on the mess decks, but when shore leave was given

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that afternoon some of the men demonstrated on the steps of Portsmouth Town Hall, and "The Red Flag" was again sung. The men were then told that in future the singing of "The Red Flag" would be a court martial offence.

On the whole, however, subversive propaganda appears at this time to have had surprisingly little effect in the Royal Navy except among some of the younger ratings. The proof of the underlying loyalty of the British sailor is to be found in the excellent work performed during the General Strike of May 1926. During this critical period the Royal Navy provided England's supply of yeast, worked the underground meat storage of London, formed links of wireless communication all round the British Isles, and performed numberless other essential services. It was for the most part unusual work which the sailors thoroughly enjoyed. Moreover, the organisation, developed and operated under Lord Jellicoe as head of the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, was magnificent.

Some advantage was, however, taken of the general spirit of unrest by some of the more disaffected elements in the Navy. "In 1926, during the General Strike, a petty officer was felt by the men serving under him to have made their lives so unbearable through his attempts to enforce petty discipline that the ratings hanged him to the beam of a hut in Pembroke Dock. He was saved from death by officers, and the ratings received various

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terms of imprisonment, some getting two years. Numerous instances can be given to show the discontent that existed throughout the ranks. The seamen workers were seething with discontent. They were like a huge bonfire, waiting for a kindling spark." The words are those of one of the ring-leaders of the great naval mutiny at Invergordon.

The breakdown of the General Strike saw an increase in the efforts of the forces of Communism to penetrate the Services, although for a time there appears to have been a lull in their activities.

In June of the following year a manifesto was issued by the Executive of the Communist International. This contained the following passages: "Soldiers, Sailors! Sons of workers and peasants, do not forget that you belong to the masses of the workers. Fraternise! . . . Remember that you have only one flag to defend—the red flag of the international working class." This manifesto was followed by the widespread distribution of seditious leaflets in naval and military centres, and towards the end of this year the *Workers' Life* ran a weekly column entitled: "Plain Talks to the Fighting Forces"—a feature which strove to spread the doctrine of extreme Communism among sailors, soldiers, and airmen.

The year 1928 saw one of the most publicised and unsavoury events in the history of the Royal Navy. This was the notorious *Royal Oak* case in the

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Mediterranean, and was concerned, not with the lower deck, but with officers. It began by objection being taken to the use of an epithet which, although exceedingly uncomplimentary, has for centuries been in common use at sea. It developed into the writing and forwarding of letters classed as insubordinate by a superior officer. Thence it became a public scandal in which the senior naval officer on the spot was denied the support of the Government. Finally, one of the officers concerned became a Socialist candidate for election to Parliament, while another embarked on a journalistic career and his sword was displayed in London as an advertisement for a fountain-pen with the legend: "The pen is mightier than the sword."

The *Royal Oak* scandal had a deep effect upon the outlook of both officers and men in the Royal Navy. It demonstrated that in face of outcry in Press or Parliament a naval officer could not rely upon the support of Whitehall, and it showed that disaffection existed also among a small minority of officers.

Meanwhile the forces of Communism were busy. In March the Executive of the Young Communist International met in Moscow and adopted a resolution containing the following passages:

"The Plenum also records great successes of the Young Communist Leagues in their work in the Army and Navy. . . . The Plenum considers it admissible and necessary to form revolutionary

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soldiers' and sailors' circles on a local scale and within individual sections of the troops."

Later in the year, at the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, a report on work in the Armed Forces was delivered. This stated: "We will make it a practice of inviting young workers not to refuse military service, but to join the Army in order to learn, in the interests of the proletariat, the art of war, and to carry on disintegrating work there in the interests of Communism." At the same congress a prominent Communist said: "We must intensify our work in the Navy and do everything in our power to build up Communist groups there, carrying on systematic agitation amongst the sailors to develop real ferment."

Not only were the men of the Royal Navy in frequent and ever increasing contact with subversive propaganda at home; propaganda of this type was even coming from within. In June 1929 concern was expressed at the quantity of subversive literature being distributed in warships, and it was believed that some, at least, was being introduced by specially trained propagandists who had entered the naval Service for this purpose. Much of the propaganda was found to have emanated direct from Moscow. Among this was a pamphlet entitled *The Sailors' and Marines' Programme*. This was widely distributed. It agitated for longer leave, extra pay for all ceremonial parades and guard duties, the abolition of all saluting, of compulsory attendance

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at church, and of courts martial. It was, in fact, a modified form of the *Soldiers' Immediate Demands* issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1925.

Abroad, too, the men of the Royal Navy were coming into constant contact with Communist propaganda. In June 1929, some destroyers of the Atlantic Fleet visited Oslo. There the men were accosted by Communist agents, who attempted to undermine their loyalty and to persuade them to join in the International Red Day Celebrations of August 1st.

In South America, too, subversive propaganda was distributed to British sailors visiting such places as Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo. When the cruiser *Caradoc* visited Rio de Janeiro in September 1929, large numbers of propaganda leaflets were left on board by visitors to the ship, and Communist slogans were chalked on gun-shields and other parts of the ship.

Meanwhile Labour had again been placed in office in England as a result of the General Election of June 1929. There followed contradictory policies with regard to the Royal Navy, since the Government were pledged to reduce unemployment and to disarm—two pledges which were manifestly contradictory under the circumstances then ruling. Naval reductions were immediately effected. Work was stopped on the building of two large cruisers, and the destroyer-building programme was halved.

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Simultaneously and inevitably the number of unemployed rose. Once again the sailor was faced with a feeling that his employment was becoming precarious while his chances of civil employment were receding.

V

THE "LUCIA" MUTINY

THE year 1930 saw the signing of the London Naval Treaty. From the national and international viewpoints it is impossible even now to assess the merits of that treaty without fear of bias. From a purely naval point of view, however, the effects of that agreement are already only too plain.

Matters were not going well at the conference leading up to the treaty when, early in April 1930, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the then Prime Minister, took a high hand. In his view it was essential that the naval conference should be saved from the deadlock and dissolution which had seen the end of the Geneva Conference of three years before. Perhaps it was because Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had been intimately concerned in that failure that he was the more anxious to avert a similar fate for the 1930 naval conference—a conference which had been convened as an outcome of his peregrinations in the New World, where he had struck something of a bargain with President Hoover.

Whatever the motive, the Prime Minister stepped in and decreed in rolling but not uncertain accents that deadlock was to be avoided. He was very anxious that agreement should be reached before

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the budget for the ensuing financial year was introduced to Parliament by his Government. In order to achieve this objective the British Delegation at the Conference gave ground on a number of points on which there was disagreement—notably with the United States.

As a result the advice of the naval advisers to the British Delegation was overruled. Not only were the standards set by such men as Jellicoe and Beatty set at naught, and another standard set up in their place; arrangements were made whereby even the new standard was made impossible of achievement. The safety limit of cruisers was reduced from the "irreducible minimum" of seventy set by Lord Jellicoe and Lord Beatty to fifty, and other clauses in the agreement made it impossible for the British Empire to possess more than thirty-five modern cruisers within the six-year span of the treaty. In addition, five excellent capital ships were to be scrapped. On such a basis agreement was achieved, and the actual treaty was signed eight days after the introduction of the budget.

On behalf of Great Britain the treaty was signed by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. A. V. Alexander, the then First Lord of the Admiralty, and Mr. Wedgwood Benn. The naval members of the Board of Admiralty, who were overruled in order that there should be some agreement to show for the Conference, consisted of:

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Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Madden, First Sea Lord.

Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, Second Sea Lord.

Vice-Admiral Roger Backhouse, Third Sea Lord and Controller.

Vice-Admiral Lionel Preston, Fourth Sea Lord.

Vice-Admiral Sir William Fisher, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.

Among laymen the true enormity of this naval treaty was slow to be appreciated. There had been agreement and reduction, both in armaments and in cost, and there were no war clouds upon the horizon. But in the Royal Navy matters were very different. It was immediately apparent to officers and men that they had been deprived by the politicians of the means with which to carry out their obligations. The straw had been taken from them, and they well knew that failure to produce the bricks on demand would lead only to courts martial and a laying of the blame upon shoulders which were in no way responsible. As if to add point to the realisation that the Royal Navy had been let down, there came the refusal of both France and Italy to bind themselves to the major portions of the treaty.

This was bad enough for the morale of the Navy, but there was another factor which had a very deep effect, and one which subsequent events were to emphasise again and again. The highest naval officers had been set at naught by a few politicians who knew nothing whatever of matters naval, and

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there was a belief that in so doing the politicians had received the acquiescence, if not the actual support, of permanent civilian officials within the Admiralty. The apex of the great pyramid of naval administration became suspect.

There were grave misgivings among the officers of the Royal Navy. On the lower deck the true significance of the treaty was not appreciated for some time. It requires the personal element to bring home the significance of politics to the sailor. But when the Navy Estimates appeared they showed that a reduction of nearly 4,500 was to be effected in the personnel. Naturally, this reduction was not immediately achieved. It was a gradual process.

During the course of the next few months, therefore, the sailor once again found himself faced with the realisation that his employment was insecure. As outward and visible signs of this, great ships were lying in the dockyards, being dismantled and prepared for the shipbreakers' yards: *Tiger*, *Benbow*, *Emperor of India*, *Marlborough*—ships with the glory of which the vast majority of the naval personnel had been brought up, so far as the Navy was concerned. Perhaps most tragic of all, H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, which had led the Grand Fleet in war and the Mediterranean Fleet in peace, was being shorn of her power and being reduced to a tragic travesty.

Eight and a half months after the signing of the treaty which brought all this about, there was a case of mutiny at Devonport.

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The submarine depot ship H.M.S. *Lucia* had been in dock during the Christmas leave period. She had been due to come out of dry dock on Wednesday, December 31st, but this operation had to be postponed owing to bad weather conditions. The ship was undocked on January 1st, and she was due to sail on Monday, January 5th, to take her place with the Atlantic Fleet on its "spring cruise." In the three intervening days the ship had to take on stores, provisions, and ammunition. She also had to coal ship. Obviously the stores, provisions, and ammunition had to be embarked either before the ship was coaled or after she had been coaled and cleaned. Time was short and cleaning after coaling, being the least important item so far as the seaworthiness and fighting efficiency of the ship was concerned, was left to the last. Docking programmes have to be carefully dovetailed into one another and into Fleet requirements, so that the operation of undocking a ship, with which weather conditions may well interfere, often has to be done very shortly before the date on which a ship has to sail.

The ship was therefore coaled after the stores, provisions, and ammunition had been embarked. Coaling was finished on Saturday, January 3rd. On that evening the ship was washed down to a certain extent, but she continued to show the dirty scars of coaling. To a layman it may not seem a dreadful thing to take a ship to sea in such a condition. But the Royal Navy has rigid standards of cleanliness,

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and the *Lucia* was going to join the Fleet. If she had appeared among the other ships in such a state she would immediately have been dubbed a disgrace to the Fleet. The men would have been shunned when they got ashore at Gibraltar, and the Commanding Officer would almost certainly have had to suffer inquiry, if not worse.

Under the circumstances there was only one thing to be done—to paint the ship on the Sunday—the day before sailing to join the Fleet.

The early part of Sunday was given over to the normal Sunday routine. That is, the men did not have to turn out so early, and they had a longer period to "clean" after breakfast. It may be that this gave the men the false impression that all work was over for the day and that they were to be allowed ashore. In the light of after events it appears that it would have been wiser to start work early and thus make it clear from the beginning that the exigencies of the Service demanded that this Sunday should be treated as an ordinary working day. It is hard to believe, however, that any man with knowledge of the Royal Navy would have thought for an instant that the ship could be taken to sea as she was. The men all knew that the ship was to sail next morning to join the Fleet. There had been plenty of bustle to this end both on board the *Lucia* and in the submarines of her flotilla.

Shore leave was granted to the engine-room personnel on Sunday, January 4th, 1931, and not

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to the remainder of the ship's company, but both officers and men knew well enough that the engine-room staff had been trimming in the coal bunkers the evening before, long after the "upper deck" personnel had finished work. Moreover, the engine-room staff would be required to raise steam and prepare for sea on the Sunday night after the rest of the personnel were in their hammocks.

Soon after 10 a.m. on Sunday, one of the submarines of the flotilla, which had had to go to sea regardless of the day of the week in order to test her wireless before sailing to join the Fleet, entered harbour and came alongside the depot ship *Lucia*. The submarine had difficulty in getting anybody on board the *Lucia* to take her lines and secure her alongside. Routine and discipline in H.M.S. *Lucia* had apparently broken down. The seamen of the crew of the *Lucia* were on the mess deck below the foremost hatch, which was shut and being guarded by the spare submarine crew which is always carried in a submarine depot ship.

The events which had led to this extraordinary state of affairs began when the seamen of the crew of H.M.S. *Lucia* were piped after breakfast on Sunday morning to "clean into painting rig"—that is, change into the clothes worn when painting ship. As a result there was some grumbling on the mess deck. It was the last day that they would spend in England for nearly three months, and many of the men, not realising the true situation,

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had made arrangements to bid their fond farewells ashore. It must be emphasised that this state of affairs was in no sense due to harsh treatment on the part of the officers, but due entirely to "the exigencies of the Service." The subsequent Admiralty statement left no doubt that the work had to be done, yet it was the officers who suffered.

Advantage was taken of the grumbling by a leading seaman bent upon making trouble. This leading seaman exhorted the men to refuse to fall in. In this he was successful. When both watches were called to fall in, the seamen remained on their mess deck, with the exception of one able seaman. Thereupon the master-at-arms, who is head of the police on board a warship, went to the mess deck and ordered the men to fall in. He was received with sullen silence. The order to fall in was then repeated, upon which the seamen closed the main hatch leading to the mess deck from the upper deck. Thus they shut themselves into their mess deck.

All petty officers and leading seamen were then ordered to fall in. They did so. Among them fell in the leading seaman who had been instrumental in starting the trouble among the seamen on the mess deck. In order to fall in with the other petty officers and leading seamen this man got out of the mess deck by way of the escape hatch. It was a clever move on the part of this man, for, because he had fallen in with the other leading

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seamen when ordered to do so, the authorities had some difficulty in establishing the part which he had played.

The officers on board H.M.S. *Lucia* did not immediately realise the gravity of what was going on down on the seamen's mess deck. The executive officer, who gave the initial order to fall in, did not immediately appreciate the full significance of the failure to fall in, and he did not himself at once visit the mess deck. The Commanding Officer was on board, but he was not informed of the state of affairs until the order to fall in had been three times given and three times disobeyed—in other words, until a state of mutiny actually existed and it was too late to do anything to avert it.

The only possible course then open to the Commanding Officer was to signal to the Royal Naval Barracks asking that an armed guard should at once be sent to deal with the mutineers. This was done. An armed guard composed of volunteers from the seamen of the Royal Naval Barracks arrived on board H.M.S. *Lucia* in a dockyard tug, and the mutinous seamen were taken under close arrest to the Royal Naval Barracks, where they were placed in custody.

In the circumstances the sailing of H.M.S. *Lucia* was cancelled and she remained, still bearing the scars of coaling, at Devonport.

The news of the mutiny leaked out almost immediately. That night—it must be remembered that

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it was Sunday and no full and proper investigation had then been possible—the Admiralty issued the following statement: "Full investigation is being made and a statement will probably be made to-morrow." At Plymouth, the naval Commander-in-Chief issued a more detailed statement in which he said: "The reports appear to be considerably exaggerated, but we have no definite information at present and I am not in a position to make a statement. If there is anything in it, I will report to the Admiralty and they will issue a statement." To this the Commander-in-Chief added: "Investigation is in progress and it can be said at once that the use of the word mutiny would be unjustifiable."

Certainly there was little enough similarity between the events in the *Lucia* and the popular conception of mutiny. There was no violence and no threat of violence. But it was nevertheless a mutiny, and, although it did not at the time appear to be a matter of vital importance, it will be seen that the manner in which it was handled by Whitehall made it one of the chief contributory causes of the mutiny at Invergordon eight months later. Already there was a feeling in the Navy that officers would not be supported, and that the supreme naval authority was powerless in the face of political pressure. The repercussions of the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia* converted suspicion into certainty.

The whole of Monday, January 5th, was occupied in a Court of Inquiry, as a result of which a long

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official statement was issued. This read as follows:

“On Sunday morning, January 4th, an infraction of discipline took place on board H.M.S. *Lucia* in the following circumstances.

“H.M.S. *Lucia* was due to undock on Wednesday, December 31st, but owing to the weather conditions was unable to do so until Thursday, January 1st, leaving only a very short period before the date of sailing with the Atlantic Fleet, during which she had to coal, ammunition, clean and paint ship and prepare for sea. This precluded week-end leave and necessitated the crew working on Sunday morning. In these circumstances 30 seamen so far forgot their duty as to remain below and shut themselves in when ordered to parade on deck for duty on Sunday morning. In consequence the men were arrested and taken in custody to the Naval Barracks.

“A Court of Inquiry sat to-day, and will continue to sit to-morrow, and further action will depend on the result of its investigation which has yet to be considered. Naval Courts of Inquiry are invariably held behind closed doors, but if the matter should result in a Court Martial this, in accordance with the custom, will be open to the public.”

It is very noticeable in this official statement that the cleaning and painting of the ship before joining the Fleet was regarded as essential.

On the following day the Admiralty issued another statement, but this was only to announce

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that the Court of Inquiry was still pursuing its investigations and that no further statement would be issued until its report had been received. In fact the Court of Inquiry did not complete its investigation until Friday, January 9th. A decision was then made which involved the trial by court martial of four members of the crew of H.M.S. *Lucia*. The remaining twenty-six men were to be summarily punished. The court martial was thereupon convened under the presidency of Captain M. K. Horton of H.M.S. *Resolution*. The four men to be tried by court martial were Able Seamen T. Gratton, E. Towl, J. E. Luck, and W. J. Wilson. Lieutenant-Commander D. V. Clift, the anti-submarine officer of the Second Submarine Flotilla (of which H.M.S. *Lucia* was the depot ship), was appointed "prisoners' friend."

Opinion in the Navy held very strongly that these men should have been tried by court martial for mutiny. But the Admiralty, it is believed at the instigation of Mr. A. V. Alexander, the Socialist First Lord, forbade the use of this charge. The men were accordingly tried on a charge of wilfully disobeying the lawful command of their superior officer.

To the lay mind the difference may not be immediately apparent. The Naval Discipline Act under which the charges were brought, however, makes a very great distinction. In the case of mutiny not accompanied by violence the ringleader or ring-

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leaders "shall suffer death or such other punishment as is hereinafter mentioned, and all other persons who shall join in such a mutiny, or shall not use their utmost exertions to suppress the same, shall suffer imprisonment or such other punishment as is hereinafter mentioned." In the case of wilful disobedience of a lawful command the maximum penalty is dismissal with disgrace from His Majesty's Service. The reduction in the gravity of the charge therefore reflected directly upon the punishment, not only of the ringleaders, but of the other twenty-six men concerned.

During the trial by court martial of the four seamen the fact that there had been earlier grumblings among the crew of H.M.S. *Lucia* was revealed. Several months before, H.M.S. *Lucia* had had to coal at Gibraltar. Coaling in the naval harbour at Gibraltar is done alongside the "coaling mole." On this mole there are numerous notices declaring that smoking is forbidden. As a general rule ships' companies of the Royal Navy are allowed to smoke while working when coaling ship. At Gibraltar, however, the executive officer of H.M.S. *Lucia* concluded that the notices were there to be obeyed and did not allow his men to smoke while coaling. Another cause for grumbling occurred in Devonport Dockyard just before the mutiny. In the Royal Dockyards there are regulations to the effect that the ships' companies of ships in the dockyard are not to proceed on short leave until 5 p.m. each day—

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the hour at which the dockyard workmen cease work. In the *Lucia* these regulations were obeyed, but the men of the *Lucia* saw "liberty-men" from a battleship lying close to them going ashore at the usual naval hour of 3.45 p.m.

There was also the long-standing grievance of the submarine flotilla attached to the Atlantic Fleet. This flotilla, because it was not then rated as part of the Atlantic Fleet, was entitled to only thirteen days' leave at Christmas, whereas the men of the rest of the Atlantic Fleet received fifteen days' leave.

It will be seen that, apart from the latter grievance, which was a matter of Admiralty administration, the causes for grumbling were concerned with the fact that the executive officer of H.M.S. *Lucia*, Lieutenant-Commander J. W. Hoskyns, although in no sense a martinet, was an officer who believed that regulations should be obeyed. As such he had every right to expect the full support of the Admiralty.

The four courts martial came to an end on January 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Able Seaman Gratton was sentenced to dismissal from the Service and to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Gratton had been defended at his trial by a solicitor. Able Seaman Towl was also sentenced to be dismissed the Service, and to six months' imprisonment with hard labour. Able Seaman Luck and Able Seaman Wilson were each sentenced to six months' detention. On the day following the termination of

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the last of the courts martial the remaining twenty-six seamen of H.M.S. *Lucia* who had been placed under arrest at the time of the mutiny were brought before Commodore N. F. Laurence, Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks, and summarily dealt with. The maximum sentence which can be given in this way is ninety days' detention.

Two days later these twenty-six men were marched under armed escort from the Royal Naval Barracks to the harbour. They embarked in a drifter, which transferred them to the light cruiser *Canterbury*. The *Canterbury* thereupon sailed for Portsmouth. On arrival at Portsmouth the prisoners were landed at Pitch House Jetty, where they were met by an armed guard. The guard took charge of the prisoners and marched them away to the Naval Detention Quarters, where they were to serve their sentences.

"Detention" in the Royal Navy consists of a regime under which periods of physical training and other drill of an arduous character are alternated with the making of mail-bags. No intercourse between prisoners is allowed and no privileges such as smoking are permitted.

With the courts martial ended and the mutineers serving their sentences one might have thought that an end had been made of the "*Lucia* incident."

But Whitehall was busy. The minutes of the Court of Inquiry and of the courts martial were being scrutinised by the Admiralty, and in

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the process bitter controversy arose within the Admiralty itself.

A Socialist Government was in office, and the head of the Admiralty was the Socialist First Lord, Mr. A. V. Alexander. The Socialists saw in the "infraction of discipline" in H.M.S. *Lucia*, and the sentences passed by the subsequent courts martial, an instance of class distinction in the Royal Navy. It was against all their principles that punishment following the "incident" should fall only upon the lower deck, and there was fear of revolt among the back benches of the Government supporters if examples, however unmerited, were not made of some of the officers of H.M.S. *Lucia*. Already Members of Parliament had been asking questions which showed the trend of feeling.

In these circumstances the political chiefs of the Admiralty seized upon a number of small matters which had been brought up either during the Court of Inquiry or during the courts martial. Chief among these were the references to previous cases of grumbling among the crew of H.M.S. *Lucia*. These have been enumerated, and it has been shown that in the majority of cases they were due to strict adherence to regulations—regulations for which, in his capacity as First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Alexander was himself responsible. The basic causes of these grievances were ignored. The fact that there had been grievances was sufficient. It showed that all had not been well with the crew of

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H.M.S. *Lucia* long before the outbreak of mutiny; and if all was not well with a ship's company the officers must obviously be responsible. Such was the attitude taken by the political element in the Admiralty.

On the other side were the Sea Lords, naval officers who found nothing at which to cavil in the findings of the Court of Inquiry or the courts martial, and who felt that great harm would be done to the naval service if naval officers were allowed to become political scapegoats.

Between these two contestants were the permanent officials and the secretariat. These are responsible for their careers and for promotion, not to the Navy, but to the Treasury. The extent of their responsibility and loyalty to the Sea Lords is further reduced by the fact that the Sea Lords only hold their appointments for a comparatively short period and are therefore largely dependent upon the permanent officials.

It was not altogether surprising, therefore, that some of these permanent officials came down on the side of the politicians, for it was to them far more than to the Sea Lords that they owed their appointments.

In the circumstances there were only two courses open to the Sea Lords. They could either give in to the politicians or they could resign in a body. The latter choice would have involved a major scandal, and might have saved neither the officers concerned

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nor the principle involved, whereas if they gave in they could try to temper the wind. They gave in.

On January 28th the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. A. V. Alexander, made the following long statement in the House of Commons:

"The Board of Admiralty have now had the opportunity of considering the minutes of the Court of Inquiry held to investigate the recent incident in H.M.S. *Lucia* and the proceedings of the resultant courts martial.

"The Board regret that it must be concluded from them that the conditions of contentment of the ship's company and sympathy between officers and men which unquestionably exist in H.M. ships generally were very far from being realised in the *Lucia*, and that this was due to some extent to want of tact and consideration on the part of the captain and executive officer and incapacity on the part of the divisional officer concerned. It is evident also that the petty officers, who should have been aware of a growing feeling of discontent among the ship's company, took no steps to check it or to bring it to the notice of their officers, and further, that there were certain individuals among the ship's company who fomented ill-will among their messmates.

"As a result of these unfortunate conditions an order which was necessary in order to meet a Service emergency, which is by no means of unusual occurrence in the Navy, and which is ordinarily met with cheerfulness by all concerned, was made the

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occasion of a concerted refusal of duty by a body of men—an unprecedented action which, whatever the supposed provocation, cannot be treated otherwise than gravely in a Service whose whole existence and purpose depend upon implicit obedience to orders.

“The Board, however, having given full weight to the extenuating circumstances already mentioned, have decided to reduce the punishments awarded by the Courts by substituting for the sentence of imprisonment with hard labour that of detention in the two cases in which the former punishment was awarded, and also reducing the period of detention by one third in all the four cases. Corresponding reductions have also been made in the summary punishments.

“The officers referred to will have their appointments terminated forthwith and will be placed on half pay, with an expression of the Board’s serious displeasure for the regrettable state of affairs revealed by this incident, and H.M.S. *Lucia* will be immediately paid off and recommissioned with a new crew of officers and men.”

The statement went on to detail the measures being taken to ensure that officers and men were aware of the proper procedure in case of complaints.

The wording of this statement made by the First Lord of the Admiralty confirmed the suspicion among officers and men in the Navy that the Sea Lords of the Admiralty were being overruled by the

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politicians. The only part of the statement which stated the views known to be held by all senior naval officers was the third paragraph, which stressed the importance of discipline in the Navy.

Thus were Commander O. E. Hallifax, D.S.O., Lieutenant-Commander J. W. Hoskyns, and Commissioned Boatswain P. A. Wright summarily dismissed from their appointments and placed on half pay. Thirty men had been punished for not obeying "lawful commands." Three officers were punished because of the "incident" arising out of the giving of these lawful commands, and because of the "growing feeling of discontent" which had been caused by Admiralty administration and strict adherence to regulations for which the Admiralty was responsible. The position was reminiscent of that at Hong Kong some years before, when a senior officer was found guilty by court martial of not preventing an act "to the prejudice of good order and naval discipline" by a junior officer who had already been found not guilty by a previous court of committing such an act.

The Admiralty's scrutiny of the minutes of the Court of Inquiry had one other repercussion. It led to the summary dismissal from the Navy of Leading Seaman Carter, who had been serving in H.M.S. *Lucia* at the time of the "incident." The case of Leading Seaman Carter was afterwards raised in the House of Commons by Mr. Hore Belisha, Member for Devonport.

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For officers to be summarily dismissed from their ship and placed on half pay except by sentence of court martial is happily an event of extreme rarity. It evoked immediate comment in Parliament. Commander Bellairs asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether, in the event of the officers concerned applying for court martial, such application would be granted. Mr. Alexander replied, "I do not think the hon. member must presume that. I think that if any of the officers concerned asked for a court martial it would be carefully considered." A few days later Colonel Lambert Ward asked: "Is the Board of Admiralty hesitating because its opinion would not be upheld by a court martial?" Mr. Alexander was very dignified. "I hope such insinuations will not be made," he replied.

The fact remains that any officer dismissed from his ship in such a way is entitled to demand trial by court martial. Not one of the three officers who had had their appointments terminated and who had been placed on half pay asked for trial by court martial. That would appear to show that they considered themselves deserving of the summary punishment which had been meted out to them. In fact this was very far from being the case. It seems very doubtful whether any court martial would have upheld the decision of the Admiralty, particularly in the case of Commander Hallifax, who had only been in command of H.M.S. *Lucia* for

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five months, during which there had been no noticeable case of grumbling.

There can be little doubt that pressure was brought to bear upon these officers to prevent them from demanding trial by court martial. It was thought in the Navy that it had been represented to them that to demand trial by court martial would only draw public attention once again to an unsavoury scandal, and that they would be serving the best interests of the Service by allowing the whole incident of the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia* to remain buried, and that thus the loyalty of these officers to the Service had been exploited in order to save the politicians from searching inquiries.

Subsequent events have proved that the best interests of the Service were very far from being served by a conspiracy of silence which only served to blacken the reputation of naval officers as a whole.

Within the Royal Navy the manner in which the *Lucia* mutiny was dealt with by Whitehall had a disastrous effect upon morale. Among officers there was a widespread feeling of having been badly "let down." The treatment of the officers of H.M.S. *Lucia* demonstrated the confirmation of their worst fears—that they could not rely upon the support of the high command and were liable at any moment to be treated as pawns in a game of which they knew nothing, but for which they had a hearty contempt. Officers continued to do their duty, but there was

no escaping the feeling that they were doing so alone and cut off from support.

"The spirit of the wardroom is the spirit of the Fleet." Those words are as true to-day as when they were first spoken—by Lord Nelson. On the lower deck, too, there was a general feeling of uncertainty—a feeling that the smooth working of a perfect machine had been suddenly interrupted. Gone was that secure feeling of going to sea with the knowledge that behind the Fleet was a perfectly organised and efficient base. An unforeseen hitch of unknown severity had occurred. Metaphorically, as well as heraldically, the Royal Navy had a foul anchor in Whitehall.

On the lower deck the repercussions of the action of the Board of Admiralty following the *Lucia* affair were even more serious. The Admiralty, dominated by a Socialist Government, had shown sympathy with men who had mutinied for a trivial cause, and had visited its displeasure at being thus embarrassed upon the officers. For the first time in history, class prejudice had been shown by the great organisation behind the Fleet. It was clear that if men objected to orders given by their officers they would not be punished in the old way, but would have at least a reasonable chance of "getting away with it" with the full support of the Admiralty, while the officers would bear the brunt. If a man knows that the orders and judgments of his officers are liable at any moment to be ruthlessly overruled by higher

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authority, he will inevitably adopt a critical attitude towards the orders he is given and to the judgments of his officers. Admiralty condonation of mutiny had injected the worst principles of Socialism into the Royal Navy, and had undermined discipline "in a Service whose whole existence and purpose depend upon implicit obedience to orders." It had also given tremendous encouragement and fillip to the agents of disruption whose business it was to stir up discontent in the fighting forces, for it is much easier to persuade a man to ignore his duty when that man has been shown that he need not fear heavy punishment.

Another serious feature of the attitude of the Admiralty at that time was that many requests forwarded on behalf of men through the normal Service channels were ignored. An instance was the case of the cooks in one of the shore establishments at Portsmouth. There were too few cooks in this establishment, which meant that the men were overworked and had a very definite grievance. This fact was strongly represented to the Admiralty on two occasions by the naval Commander-in-Chief, but no action was taken by the Admiralty. Finally the men appealed to their Member of Parliament, who took the matter up with immediate success.

Thus it was again demonstrated to the men of the Royal Navy that their officers were of no account beside the politicians.

Great difficulties were put in the way of senior

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officers when they endeavoured to get rid of men whose influence in the Navy was undesirable. The normal procedure is to recommend to the Admiralty that such a man should be discharged "services no longer required." The administration of the Admiralty about this time was such that recommendations of this type were almost invariably rejected. The naval Commander-in-Chief of one of the home ports went so far as to say that it was useless to forward recommendations of the sort to the Admiralty. Thus undesirable influences continued to flourish in the Navy in spite of the efforts and recommendations of the officers.

VI

THE VISIT TO GERMANY

"THE discontent was widespread. Sooner or later it was bound to break out and express itself in action." This was the state of affairs on the lower deck of the Navy following upon the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia*, according to Able Seaman Len Wincott, one of the men concerned in the Invergordon mutiny. This appreciation of the feeling in the Navy at this time occurs in a pamphlet published by Len Wincott after his dismissal from the Royal Navy in connection with the Invergordon mutiny.

Able Seaman Wincott in 1931 was serving in H.M.S. *Norfolk*, one of the cruisers of the Second Cruiser Squadron attached to the Atlantic Fleet. H.M.S. *Norfolk* was manned from Devonport, which was the home port to which she returned after every cruise. This fact is full of significance. In 1931 the dockyard port of Devonport was the link between a number of events. It was at Devonport that the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia* occurred. The later mutiny in the Chilean Navy has been proved to have been due to subversive and mutinous influences picked up by the crew of the Chilean battleship *Almirante Latorre* when, in 1931, she was being completed after an extensive refit in Devonport dockyard. H.M.S. *Rodney*, the battleship which was called by

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the mutineers the "directing ship" of the "sailors' soviet" at the mutiny of Invergordon, was also a Devonport manned ship, using Devonport as her home port.

Whatever the extent of the discontent on the lower deck of the Royal Navy in the months succeeding the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia*, it showed no clear signs of coming to the surface. A casual observer might well have thought during those months that the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia* was an isolated incident which had been in every sense terminated by the disciplinary action taken.

In May 1931 the ships of the Atlantic Fleet left their home ports for their summer cruise. After a period of fleet training the various units separated, some for individual training, some to "show the flag" abroad or at some of the British seaside resorts. The Second Cruiser Squadron went to the Baltic. Libau and Stockholm were visited, after which the cruisers H.M.S. *Norfolk* and H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* visited Kiel.

These two ships were the first British warships to enter a German port upon a purely friendly visit since the Great War. Everything connected with this visit, therefore, had to be handled with great tact. The fact that the British ships had recently met the German Navy at Libau, where an international fleet consisting of vessels from Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Great Britain had been present for the celebrations

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marking the anniversary of the foundation of the Latvian Republic, had not done a great deal to ease matters. It is interesting to note that Libau at that time was a stronghold of Communism.

Kiel in the summer of 1931 was also full of Communists. This was before Herr Hitler had come into power and driven the Communists out of Germany.

The British cruisers arrived at Kiel on July 4th, 1931, and the first sight which their crews, who were fallen in on the upper deck for entering harbour, saw as they steamed into Kielshaven was the German War Memorial on the southern side of the entrance. This, and the magnificent eagle which surmounts it, had been painted bright red. Later in the day, when the English sailors went ashore, they found that almost every statue in the town had received similar treatment. In the harbour, H.M.S. *Norfolk* and H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* occupied a berth between the German cruisers *Königsberg* and *Karlsruhe*.

Only thirteen years before, Kiel had been the scene of some of the most serious riots which attended the great mutiny of the German Fleet. Following that mutiny, Seaman Max Reichpietsch and Stoker Alwyn Koebis, two of the ringleaders, had been court-martialled and shot. Others, however, had escaped, and the Unabhängige Sozial-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands—the organisation with the help of which the mutiny of the German Fleet had been brought about—still existed.

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It is true, there had been a split in the Unabhängige Sozial-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands, after which many of its members had joined the Sozial-Demokratische Partei and many more had joined the Communist Party, but a group of the original organisation still existed and was active under the leadership of the notorious revolutionary Ledebour. Frau Zeitz, who had given Seaman Reichpietsch such valuable help in the organisation of the mutiny of the German High Seas Fleet, had joined the Communist Party.

Communist agents were exceedingly active in Kiel at the time of the visit of the British cruisers. Officers and men of the British cruisers were continually being accosted ashore by Communists, either with the purpose of insulting them, or of pressing seditious propaganda upon them. The German naval authorities at Kiel at that time recognised the intimidatory power of the Communists and went out of their way to avoid any direct clash.

On the night of the arrival of the British cruisers a dance for officers was given at the Kiel Yacht Club, which is the German equivalent to the British Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes. At this dance the atmosphere of coolness between conquered and conquerors was immediately apparent. The British officers were given a correct but frigid welcome, the German officers accorded to them only the bare minimum of courtesy demanded by the occasion,

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and they avoided introducing their womenfolk to the British officers. In these very awkward circumstances British tact prevailed. The senior British officer "passed the word" unostentatiously to the British officers that they were to take no notice of any rudeness and were to make every effort to give the impression that they were enjoying themselves and noticed nothing amiss. They were also to ask the ladies to dance in default of an introduction if one was not forthcoming. Fortunately this attitude had its effect, and the dance ended on a note of friendliness which had been so lacking at the commencement.

Two evenings later another dance was given, this time by the German Commander-in-Chief at Kiel, Vice-Admiral Hansen, at his official residence ashore. This function was held in the back rooms of the house for fear that the lights in the front windows and the sounds of the festivities might attract the attention of the Communists, and lead to a riot and the throwing of stones at the windows.

This fear of stones being thrown by the Communists in Kiel appeared to be fully justified, for two midshipmen from the British cruisers who had hired horses to ride on the racecourse were actually stoned while they were passing through the town.

Throughout this visit of the British warships to Kiel there was a great deal of fraternising between the men of the British cruisers and the German naval personnel and townspeople. Some at least of the

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British sailors must have met and talked with people who had taken part in the terrible events of thirteen years before.

The British sailors did not spend all their time in Kiel. Charabanc parties were organised for visits to Hamburg, about sixty miles away. While they were there some of the men certainly visited the notorious International Seamen's Club, which was known to be the headquarters of subversive influences of the most virulent type, and a stronghold of the Communist International of Seamen and Harbour Workers.

Able Seaman Len Wincott became actively associated with the International Labour Defence—a militant branch of the Communist Party—immediately after his dismissal from the Navy in connection with the Invergordon mutiny, and he was at least in touch with the Communist Party before this.

There is little doubt that certain contacts with Communist organisations in Germany were arranged for him in Kiel, and probably also in Hamburg.

It is significant also that, after his discharge from the Royal Navy, he seems to have been immediately recognised by the International Labour Defence as a man with knowledge and experience of international Communism, for he represented the International Labour Defence at the Anti-War Congress at Amsterdam in August 1932.

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In the Navy it was recognised that Wincott was a man of far higher intelligence than the average able seaman. He had certainly been well educated. He was a master of phrase, spoke well and convincingly, and had a gift for argument. No man on the lower deck could hope to worst him in argument. He was well read, quick-witted, and exceedingly plausible. At Invergordon he showed that he counted the art of manipulating a typewriter among his other accomplishments. With him in H.M.S. *Norfolk* at Kiel was Able Seaman Frederick Cope-man, another man who was dismissed from the Royal Navy after the mutiny at Invergordon, and who, after his dismissal, was active with the International Labour Defence. Since his discharge from the Navy, he has been a hunger marcher, a speaker at the Annual Congress of the Communist Party, London Organiser of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, and was wounded in the defence of Madrid against the forces of General Franco when serving with the International Column in 1937.

The mutiny of the German Navy in 1918 was organised in the first instance as what was called by the sailors a "strike." Its organisation before the outbreak of violence depended upon the workings of a "sailors' soviet" composed of two representatives from each ship. Cheering from ship to ship was widely used on every occasion when work should have been done and whenever there appeared to be

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danger of any ship wavering in its allegiance to the general cause of mutiny.

At Invergordon in 1931 the mutiny was called by the men a "strike." This so-called "strike" was arranged and fostered by a "sailors' soviet" consisting of representatives elected from the crew of each ship. At Invergordon, also, cheering was widely used by the men. It was used almost in the form of a code to let the other ships know that the crews of their consorts were still in open mutiny. It was also used to stiffen resistance whenever an officer was seen to be addressing the men of a ship.

The similarity in the organisation of the mutiny of the German High Seas Fleet in 1918 and the mutiny of the British Fleet at Invergordon in 1931 is too great to be ignored, particularly when one considers that two of the ringleaders of the mutiny at Invergordon visited Kiel only two months before the outbreak at Invergordon and came into close contact with the Communist influences which had helped to arrange and organise the mutiny of the German Fleet.

The interest of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the visit of the British cruisers to Kiel at this time was shown by the following comments in its organ the *Daily Worker*. "Kiel. The collaboration of the Imperialists for war will be met by the united demonstration of the workers against war on August 1st."

Nothing occurred on August 1st, but there is

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no doubt that the Communist International and particularly the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, were greatly interested in the mutiny in the British Fleet at Invergordon. Not only was the newspaper of the German Communist Party suppressed by the Chief of Police in Berlin because it printed a message of congratulation and further incitement to the mutineers, but the Communist Party of Great Britain sent the following message to the mutineers in the Atlantic Fleet:

“Your magnificent demonstration against the attempt which is being made to save the shaky structure of capitalism by imposing starving conditions on masses of working men, women, and children will serve as a great encouragement to all those who are fighting the National Government ashore.

“Especially does it show the strong bond of solidarity between all workers whether in industry, at the Labour Exchanges, or in the armed Forces.

“Your demonstration has aroused a response right throughout the world, especially among the workers of Germany, where the heavy burden of the Versailles Treaty and the infamous Young Plan imposed terrible burdens of poverty on the masses. This response is expressed in the message of greetings to the British sailors from our brother Communist Party of that country.

“The workers have one common enemy—the robber Capitalists. They have one common interest,

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solidarity in action against worsened conditions, against the National Government and its economy plan.

“The statement of MacDonald made in the name of the bureaucrats of the Admiralty that the sailors are prepared to agree to a wage cut provided the unemployed have their relief cut is a palpable lie and an insult to the workers who constitute the main body of the Fleet.

“You understand the bitter struggle these unemployed men and women have to live.

“You know what the cut means to them, just as you know what the cut means to you, to your women folk and children.

“The millions of unemployed and employed workers who are so determinedly fighting against wage cuts and against cuts in unemployment relief are with you in your fight.

“Do not be deceived by the Admiralty promises of ‘investigations,’ continue your struggle.

“Long live the working class fighters of the Fleet.

“Long live the solidarity of all workers.”

The specific reference to the workers of Germany and “our brother Communist Party of that country” is most significant.

Proof positive that an attempt was made to spread disaffection among the British sailors during the visit of the British cruisers to Kiel was given when the ships were passing through the Kiel Canal on the conclusion of their visit.

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The ships had almost reached the western end of the canal, not far from Cuxhaven—the end of the canal nearest to Hamburg—when an enormous banner was hoisted between two masts on the south bank. The banner was scarlet and bore in English in large white letters the following exhortation: “Sailors and Marines! Turn your guns on your officers! Now is the time!”

The German naval liaison officer, Ober-lieutenant Gott, was still on board H.M.S. *Norfolk*. He was greatly enraged by this display and landed at the earliest possible moment to get in touch with the police. History does not relate whether the perpetrators of this act were ever captured and punished. It seems improbable, for the banks of the Kiel Canal at that spot were covered thickly with bushes and scrub, so that it was impossible to see from H.M.S. *Norfolk* whether the banner was being hoisted by a few isolated men or whether a considerable number were present.

After leaving Kiel, H.M.S. *Norfolk* and H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* rejoined the other ships of the Second Cruiser Squadron and the whole squadron spent a short time at Torbay before the ships dispersed and returned to their home ports to give summer leave to the ships' companies. H.M.S. *Norfolk* then returned to Devonport. Among the other ships of the Atlantic Fleet which assembled at Devonport at the end of July and remained there until the beginning of September was H.M.S. *Rodney*, sister ship of

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H.M.S. *Nelson*, flag-ship of the Atlantic Fleet, and one of the only two battleships built by Great Britain since the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922.

H.M.S. *Rodney* was afterwards described by the mutineers as the "directing ship" of the great naval mutiny at Invergordon. It is certain that the frame of mind which made the Invergordon mutiny possible was engendered in H.M.S. *Rodney* while at Devonport, and there seems little doubt that the whole idea and planning of a mutiny in the British Navy, which was to take place on the first auspicious occasion, was picked up in Germany by men of H.M.S. *Norfolk* during the visit to Kiel and transferred to certain individuals on board H.M.S. *Rodney* during the stay of the two ships at Devonport.

Although H.M.S. *Rodney* became the official "directing ship" of the mutiny, Able Seaman Wincott in H.M.S. *Norfolk* retained in his own hands much of the organisation, such as the initial formation of the "sailors' soviet" of representatives from each ship, and the drafting and distribution of the manifesto of the mutineers.

VII

THE PAY CUTS

THE year 1931 was marked by a succession of serious events almost throughout the world, events which had as their culmination the mutiny of the British Fleet at Invergordon and the abandonment a few days later of the gold standard by Great Britain. Reviewing the events of this year, the *Survey of International Affairs* states that "it felt as though the combined forces of Fate and Folly were making a concentrated attack upon the citadel of Civilisation."

This is no more than the truth. Beginning with industrial disputes, the year brought forth events which led to the economic blizzard. This in turn led to the mutiny of the British Atlantic Fleet, an event which had world-wide repercussions in the spheres both of finance and of policy.

In the early part of the year there were strikes in the South Wales coalfields and in the Lancashire cotton mills. At the end of the first week of January the Ministry of Labour announced that there were 2,643,127 people out of work, an increase in unemployment of nearly 100 per cent over the previous year. There was early warning that unemployment benefit at the existing scale could not be continued in face of such a rapid and large rise in the number

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of persons entitled to the benefit. A Royal Commission had been set up in December of the previous year to inquire into the question, and on January 29th this Commission was presented with a memorandum from the Treasury pointing out that continued borrowing on the current scale for payment of benefit without adequate provision for repayment by the fund would quickly call in question the stability of British public finances. But Labour was in office. For the Government to press for reductions in expenditure on unemployment benefit would have been political suicide. The warnings went unheeded, even though they were sounded by the Socialist Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On February 11th the Conservatives in the House of Commons brought a vote of censure against the Government, alleging unsound financial policy. The motion was defeated by 310 votes to 235, yet in the course of the debate Mr. Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, admitted that the financial position of the country was very grave, and he issued a warning that drastic measures calling for sacrifice from all classes would have to be taken. Ten days later in his constituency Mr. Snowden repeated his warning, and stated that unemployment was costing the country £100,000,000 a year.

By March matters had become so bad that action of some kind could no longer be delayed.

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On March 17th a committee—under the chairmanship of Sir George May and known as the May Economy Committee—was set up. This Committee was instructed to examine the national expenditure and make recommendations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on all possible reductions in expenditure.

The financial year closed with a deficit of £23,275,971, yet when Mr. Snowden introduced his budget it was found that he had budgeted for a deficit of £37,366,000 for the financial year 1931-2. He was only putting off the evil hour of retrenchment. Meanwhile Mr. Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, was trying to arrange for American credit to bolster up the position in England. He had meetings in America with President Hoover, Secretary Mellon, and the Governors and Members of the Federal Reserve Board, with this object.

The month of May proved that practically the whole civilised world was experiencing the mad economic blizzard. Australia had a rapidly increasing deficit. New Zealand had a deficit of more than £1,500,000 out of a total revenue of £23,000,000. Canada had a deficit equal to nearly one quarter of her total revenue. The United States had a deficit of more than 985 million dollars. Newfoundland asked for a Royal Commission to be set up to inquire into its finances. Germany, Italy, Japan, Chile, Belgium, Turkey,

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and a number of other nations were in financial difficulties.

On May 11th the Credit Anstalt für Handel und Gewerbe was threatened with failure. This was the mainstay of Austrian finance and an integral part of the financial structure of Europe. In drawing a parallel between the financial events of 1931 and the political events of 1914, the threatened failure of this organisation has been compared in its effect with the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo.

Meanwhile in England the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance had reported that the cost of unemployment benefit was £120,000,000 a year. Mr. Snowden had under-estimated. The Commission further reported that, in addition to the unemployment benefits, local authorities were disbursing relief to able-bodied persons at the rate of £4,000,000 a year. It pointed out that the local authorities had borrowed £6,000,000 and that the Unemployment Insurance Fund was then £80,000,000 in debt and incurring fresh debt at the rate of £1,000,000 a week.

To add to the British preoccupations, an armed insurrection broke out in Burma.

In the following month the war debt moratorium was mooted. The Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out that this would not do Great Britain much good, as it would cost her £11,000,000 a year. Germany, however, was the financial storm centre

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in Europe, and something had to be done to prevent her total collapse. At the beginning of July foreign withdrawals from Germany were renewed, and on July 13th the Darmstädter Bank in Berlin was forced to close its doors. Almost simultaneously, France began withdrawing on a large scale from London. A few days later a Seven-Power Conference, called to find ways and means of preventing the collapse of Germany, failed after only three days of deliberations. The failure was due to the attitude of France, the only nation in a reasonably good financial position and upon whom the major sacrifices were therefore bound to fall. On the day of the breakdown of this conference the Bank of England raised its minimum discount rate from $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Within a week it was reported that the City of London was unable to promise that it would participate in an international loan of £7,000,000 for the Hungarian Government. This was a state of affairs without precedent in the financial history of the City of London. Two days later the Bank of England, having lost £9,500,000 of gold in a week, raised its discount rate to $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

On July 31st, the day of the commencement of the parliamentary recess, the May Economy Committee presented its report. The report pointed out that a sum of £120,000,000 had to be made good, and recommended, among other things, that the rates of pay for all three Defence Services should be consolidated on the 1925 rates, and that the salaries

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of teachers and all other Government servants should be drastically reduced. To the main report of the committee was added a minority report recommending that all sacrifices should be borne by those deriving incomes from investments as well as by the wage-earners.

On the following day, August 1st, the Bank of France and the Federal Reserve Bank of the United States each placed a credit of £25,000,000 at the disposal of the Bank of England. On the same day the Treasury authorised an increase of £15,000,000 in the fiduciary note issue. These steps tended to stop the financial rot. That they were badly needed was shown by the fact that the gold reserve of the Bank of England had fallen from £165,810,946 to £133,309,663, despite imports from Australia and South Africa, and that in the week ending July 29th the gold loss had amounted to £16,734,921, in spite of the fact that the outflow had been checked in the middle of the week by the French and American credits. Small wonder that the exchanges were erratic.

Still the much threatened measures of economy did not materialise. On August 11th the Cabinet met and set up an Economy Committee consisting of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Philip Snowden, Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. William Graham, and Mr. J. H. Thomas. This committee held its first meeting on the following day, but there was no hint of rapid action, and meanwhile unemployment was

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still rising. On August 18th the Ministry of Labour figures showed that there were 2,714,359 out of work—the highest total of unemployed then on record. Next day the Cabinet met the Economy Committee and sat all day. It then became clear that the Cabinet were waiting to see what the attitude of the Trades Union Council, then in session at Bristol, was likely to be to the economy proposals. Being a Labour Government, it must be remembered that the Cabinet held office largely through the good offices of the Trades Union Council, the political executive of the trade unions.

Thus, faced with the immediate and most urgent need for action, delay followed on delay. The country waited, and the longer it waited for decisions to be made the more confidence, that great stabiliser of crises, evaporated.

On August 23rd the King returned from Balmoral and saw the heads of the political parties. The crisis had taken a new turn. From being concerned entirely with finance it had become political. On the following day the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, resigned. The Labour Government was out of office. A General Election at that juncture was unthinkable, and on August 25th the first National Government was formed under the premiership of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

In the new Cabinet, Mr. Alexander gave place to Sir Austen Chamberlain as First Lord of the Admiralty, and Earl Stanhope was appointed

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Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty. The office of Civil Lord was not filled. It remained vacant until after the General Election.

On the following day it was reported that the Bank of England had already lost 80 per cent of the £50,000,000 credit placed at its disposal by France and America at the beginning of the month. The flight of capital from London had not been stemmed. It had, in fact, been accelerated to some extent by the super-imposition of a political crisis and the delay in bringing about measures of economy. This delay continued from day to day in spite of the fact that the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, promised in a broadcast address delivered on the evening of the formation of the first National Government that "swift and decisive action" was to be taken to restore world confidence in British credit.

Another breathing-space was arranged before the Government economy proposals materialised. This was the arrangement of a further credit from America and France amounting to £80,000,000. Unlike the former credit, which was secured by the Bank of England, this credit was arranged by the Treasury itself, proving that the financial crisis had reached a stage when the economic life of the nation was at stake. There is little doubt that this credit, coming at a time when the "economic blizzard" in Europe was showing signs of diminishing, and when the Government's economy programme was imminent, would have saved the

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pound sterling had it not been for the mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon.

On September 1st the Cabinet completed its plans for the economy drive. In a broad sense these plans were based upon the recommendations made by the May Economy Committee exactly a month before. Details of the plan were not, however, made known even at this stage, for Parliament was still in recess. It did not meet until September 8th, and then it did so with an example of sacrifice from the Throne, the King having the day before announced that he would voluntarily suffer a cut of £50,000 in his Civil List. On the day Parliament met further unemployment figures were issued by the Ministry of Labour. These showed that 2,762,219 persons were out of work, an increase of 47,560 since August 18th, and that the number of unemployed was still rising.

In these circumstances the Government's Economy Bill was formally presented to Parliament. In practice it did not appear greatly to affect Parliament, for the Bill made provision for the economies to be effected by the issue of a series of Orders in Council which were, in the aggregate, to effect a saving in expenditure of £70,000,000. The saving demanded in the report of the May Economy Committee had been reduced by £50,000,000. Even now the General Council of the Trades Union Council was fighting against the economies, and it suggested, as an alternative to retrenchment, a

devaluation of the currency—in other words, the abandonment of the gold standard. This was forced upon the country exactly a fortnight later by the repercussions of the events at Invergordon.

The presentation of the Economy Bill had, of course, been preceded by heart-searching on the part of the various Government Departments with regard to how, and to what extent, the economies proposed by the Cabinet were permissible and feasible. It was, however, somewhat natural, observing the political crisis which had clouded the purely financial issue, that the Government Departments should have had less say in these matters than the Trades Union Council.

At the Admiralty the proposed cuts were examined when the report of the May Committee was made, and when the Labour Government was still in office. Recommendations regarding the proposed cuts in naval pay were certainly made to the Cabinet by the Admiralty, but the Cabinet Ministers chiefly concerned seemed only a short time afterwards unable to agree as to what exactly had been advised. This can only be put down to the fact that the political crisis overshadowed all departmental matters, and that urgent representations from the Admiralty were overridden. Certainly if, as the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. A. V. Alexander, maintained in the House of Commons, they were made, they were either misunderstood or ignored.

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When, after the news of the mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet was out, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the new First Lord of the Admiralty, was asked in the House of Commons whether the cuts in naval pay were among the cuts which were agreed provisionally by the members of the late Cabinet, Sir Austen Chamberlain replied: "It is not very easy for me to answer about the late Cabinet, but the instructions which I found at the Admiralty when I arrived there were to make these cuts."

Immediately there was a storm of protest. Mr. Alexander, so soon as he could get a hearing, demanded: "Is the Right Honourable Gentleman aware, first, that the men of the Fleet were defended faithfully with regard to their position by his predecessor; secondly, that the Cabinet of the day were warned specifically by the Admiralty, the Sea Lords, and their political representatives of the danger of what has since taken place; and thirdly, he has said that instructions were left that the cuts were to be made—has he not been aware that it was left for the details of any procedure to be taken to be discussed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?"

Here was revelation. Had the Cabinet been warned that cuts in pay in the Royal Navy would be followed by mutiny? The House, not unmindful of the fact that on September 1st the Chilean Fleet had broken into open and violent mutiny off Coquimbo on a question of cuts in pay, seized upon Mr. Alexander's revelation and sought to find the

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substance of it. But the House was frustrated. The Prime Minister, having "charged his memory," said that "the advice given to us by the Admiralty was that the men would loyally accept these cuts provided two things were done. One was that there were cuts all round in the public services; and two, that an adequate cut was made in unemployment pay." The House demanded documentary evidence to show who was right in this controversy, but the existence of any document was denied, and the demand was ruled out on a point of order.

Nobody was satisfied. Whatever allowances were made for the new First Lord of the Admiralty, the excuse that he had merely put into effect the provisions left by his predecessor could hardly be accepted. Moreover, Mr. Alexander reiterated that "instructions had not been given for the cuts to be put into operation at the Admiralty when we left." Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's statement savoured too much of an excuse for imposing cuts on unemployment benefit, a matter on which he was being attacked on all sides.

The truth undoubtedly lies midway between the contentions of the two First Lords. Certain proposals for effecting economy by reductions in pay had certainly been drawn up in the Admiralty during the tenure of office of the Labour Government, but these proposals certainly were not acted upon during the time that Mr. Alexander was First Lord. On Sir Austen Chamberlain's arrival at the

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Admiralty the proposals must have been shown to him, and it was probably not made clear to him that these were mere draft proposals designed to form a basis for discussion. He was led to believe that they had already been discussed, and represented the considered view of the Admiralty organisation. If there is any blame in this matter, therefore, it must undoubtedly fall upon some of the permanent officials at the Admiralty, who had continued at the Admiralty during the changes in the political heads of that Department.

To understand the cuts imposed on naval pay, and the reasons behind their hostile reception in the Fleet, one must go back six years—to 1925, when the Anderson Committee reported on the rates of pay obtaining in all Government Services. This committee found that, taking into consideration the fact that the cost of living had fallen during the preceding few years, the rates of pay in the Royal Navy were too high. These rates of pay were those fixed as the result of the findings of the Jerram Committee in 1919. The Anderson Committee recommended cuts in the naval pay which amounted to twenty-five per cent in the case of an able seaman if allowances and the pay attaching to non-substantive or specialist qualifications was not taken into account. Under the rates of pay fixed after the war as a result of the Jerram Committee's report the flat rate of pay for an able seaman was 4s. a day. The Anderson Committee

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recommended a reduction in this pay to 3s. a day.

In the Admiralty, and between the Admiralty and the Treasury, there was considerable argument over the rates of naval pay after the Anderson Committee's recommendations became known. At the Admiralty, Lord Beatty was then First Sea Lord. He held that it was impossible to reduce the rates of pay of men already serving in the Royal Navy, for a great many of these men had entered the Navy upon the understanding that they would be paid at the existing rate. Lord Beatty was of the opinion that to reduce the rates of pay for men already serving would constitute a breach of contract with the men. Moreover, Lord Beatty was well aware of the living conditions in and around the naval ports, where there was at that time a great deal of profiteering on rents and other living expenses, so that the cost of living for a naval man with a wife and family was considerably higher than the cost of living index over the country as a whole—the index upon which the recommendations of the Anderson Committee had been made.

Eventually compromise was reached, but not before the warfare had become so bitter that Lord Bridgeman and Lord Beatty had threatened resignation if the Treasury persisted in the demand that the reductions of pay should apply to men already serving. The compromise provided for new reduced scales of pay being enforced for all men entering the Royal Navy after October 4th, 1925—the day upon

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which the reduced rates would apply. But the pay of men already serving on that date was not to be reduced. Thus an able seaman already serving before October 4th, 1925, would continue to be paid at the rate of 4s. a day, but the rate of pay for an able seaman entered after that date was to be 3s. a day. There were, therefore, two entirely separate scales of pay in the Royal Navy.

Lord Beatty had gained his point. This factor in the events culminating in the mutiny at Invergordon was very important.

The fact that there had been a fight between Lord Beatty and the Treasury over the rates of pay was widely known in the Fleet, and it was appreciated that the First Sea Lord had maintained that to reduce the pay of men already serving would constitute a breach of contract. Therein lay the origin of much of the trouble which arose at Invergordon six years later. The report of the May Committee on Economy recommended that all naval pay should be reduced to the level of the 1925 rates—in other words, it recommended that the recommendations of the Anderson Committee of 1925 should now be enforced in full. Knowing the history of the fight between the Treasury and the Admiralty on this very point, and the Admiralty's victory of six years before, the men of the Royal Navy never imagined that these recommendations of the May Committee would ever be enforced.

It must be remembered that there served on the

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May Economy Committee not a single person who had any insight into the special problems and living conditions of men in the Royal Navy. Yet the Government's Economy Bill enforced the recommendations of the May Committee. On October 1st, 1931, *all* naval pay was to be reduced to the 1925 scale introduced after the report of the Anderson Committee. Since the action and attitude of Lord Beatty in 1925 was known among the men of the lower deck, it was small wonder that they considered that they had been made the victims of a breach of contract on the part of the Government. The Admiralty statement which had been circulated in the Navy on December 17th, 1925, had, referring to a subversive leaflet, stated "this leaflet hints that the recent reductions in the pay of new entries is a step towards reducing the existing rates. This is untrue and has no foundation on fact."

From 1925 to 1931 there had been carried on behind the scenes in Whitehall an unceasing agitation to secure the adoption of the 1925 (Anderson Committee) rates of pay throughout the Royal Navy. The inconvenience of having two different scales of pay in operation was freely used as an argument and lever. The agitation was carried on not only by the Treasury, whose business it is always to curtail the spending Departments whenever possible, but also within the Admiralty itself. There it was carried on by some of the permanent Civil Service officials—men whose task it was to serve the Admiralty and

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the Navy but at the same time to act as the liaison between the Admiralty and the Treasury. These officials had, of necessity, a great deal of power within the Admiralty, power which was increased by rapid changes among the Sea Lords and among the political Lords of the Admiralty—men often without knowledge of the workings of the administration of the Royal Navy. It was natural that such men had to lean upon the permanent officials and that the power of the latter increased accordingly.

The case of Sir Oswyn Murray, a Secretary of the Admiralty who served the Navy long and faithfully, may be cited as an instance to show how much a First Lord of the Admiralty has to rely upon a permanent official. Sir Oswyn Murray was due to retire at the end of 1931. He had, in fact, announced that he proposed to retire from public life. The General Election of 1931 brought Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell to the Admiralty as First Lord. Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell soon found that he had to lean heavily upon the experienced shoulders of the Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, and he persuaded Sir Oswyn Murray to continue in office. This he did for some five years.

The Navy often speaks of "strong" Boards of Admiralty, and "weak" Boards of Admiralty. From the end of the Great War until 1926 there was a "strong" Board of Admiralty in office. Now once again there is a "strong" Board of Admiralty. It is not mere coincidence that in both these cases of

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“strong” Boards of Admiralty the naval side has been headed by a First Sea Lord who has held office much longer than the normal. After the war Lord Beatty was First Sea Lord. To-day Lord Chatfield is First Sea Lord. Lord Beatty held the office for six years. Lord Chatfield has now been First Sea Lord for nearly five years. Both had served at the Admiralty long enough to learn the whole of the inner workings of that vast machine, and could therefore cease to rely completely upon the permanent officials of the Admiralty.

When Sir Austen Chamberlain said in the House of Commons that “the instructions which I found at the Admiralty when I arrived there were to make these cuts” (in naval pay), he spoke no more than the truth. It was part of the agitation, which had been going on for six years, to keep the question of cutting all naval pay to the levels recommended by the Anderson Committee constantly before those in authority at the Admiralty. To this end the recommendations for the reduction in naval pay were immediately brought to the notice of any Minister coming new to the Admiralty.

Yet Mr. Alexander was also speaking the truth when he retorted to Sir Austen Chamberlain that “the men of the Fleet were defended faithfully with regard to their position” and that “the Cabinet of the day were warned specifically by the Admiralty, the Sea Lords, and their political representatives of the danger of what has since taken place.”

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Mr. Alexander, when he went to the Admiralty as First Lord, was duly subjected to the Treasury agitation for the unification of the scales of naval pay upon the reduced 1925 rates. The First Lord consulted the Sea Lords and the records of the battles which Lord Beatty had won in 1925. He also visited the naval ports and sought the opinion of highly placed naval officers serving in the ships and establishments. As a result he was convinced that any universal enforcement of the reduced 1925 rates of pay would be resented on the lower deck of the Royal Navy as a breach of contract, and that it would lead to grave danger of disaffection in the Fleet. He therefore refused to succumb to the demands of the Treasury. "The men of the Fleet were defended faithfully with regard to their positions." Mr. Alexander went further. The growing urgency of the financial situation and the need for economy led to Government support for the Treasury case for reduction, and Mr. Alexander went so far as to give specific warning to the Cabinet that enforcement of cuts in naval pay such as those demanded by the Treasury might well lead to discontent in the Navy.

The Cabinet, armed with the report of the May Economy Committee, asked whether cuts in pay would be accepted by the men of the Royal Navy if the cuts were part of a national sacrifice in which all Government servants and the fighting Services would share equally. To this the Admiralty replied

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in the affirmative. They said they considered that reductions in naval pay could be effected provided equal reductions were imposed upon the unemployed and upon all Government services. There is no doubt that the Admiralty were right in their opinion. The men of the Royal Navy would have accepted a percentage reduction if everybody else paid by the State suffered an identical percentage reduction. No such percentage reduction was, however, made. The cuts enforced were reductions to the 1925 rates of pay—the one form of reduction which would be regarded by the men as a betrayal of trust, and which would impose a far greater degree of reduction and consequent hardship upon certain classes of naval ratings than upon anybody else in the country.

Considering that the whole question of these reductions in pay to the 1925 scales had been before successive Boards of Admiralty for six years, and that the Board in office in 1931 knew of the probable effect of enforcing such cuts, it is amazing that they were actually enforced.

The passing of the reductions in pay in that form constituted one of the gravest blunders ever made by any Board of Admiralty. Even to-day it is difficult to appreciate how the passage of those pay cuts through the Board of Admiralty was effected. The blame has been laid at the door of all manner of people, ranging from the Cabinet to the bankers, but there is no denying that a great deal of the

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responsibility lies with the Board of Admiralty of that time.

Nor was the actual passage of the reductions in pay through the Board of Admiralty the only blunder committed in the Admiralty at this time. Extraordinary as it may seem, some of the high officers most directly concerned in questions relating to the pay of the Royal Navy were never informed that cuts in naval pay were contemplated, nor was their advice sought. Among these officers was the Paymaster Director-General of the Navy and the Adjutant-General of the Royal Marines. These officers were faced with a *fait accompli* which swiftly brought about the situation about which Mr. Alexander had warned the Treasury and the Government.

When the financial crisis was at its height and the political crisis arose which led to the formation of the First National Government, many members of the Board of Admiralty were on leave.

The formation of the new Government brought Sir Austen Chamberlain to the Admiralty as First Lord. Naturally, coming into office at that hectic moment, he was not conversant with the history of the projected pay cuts, and had no opportunity of studying the question. He was therefore forced to rely to a large extent upon the permanent officials of the Admiralty for assistance and guidance.

Earl Stanhope, who came to the Admiralty as Parliamentary and Financial Secretary, had been

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Civil Lord of the Admiralty during the term of office of the previous Conservative Government from 1924 to 1929.

No new Civil Lord was appointed on the formation of the First National Government.

The other civilian member of the Board of Admiralty was Sir Oswyn Murray, Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, and the chief link between the Treasury and the Admiralty. His right-hand man was the Principal Assistant Secretary, Sir Vincent Baddeley, who later became Deputy Secretary of the Admiralty. At the time that the pay cuts were passed by the Board of Admiralty and issued to the Fleet in the form of Admiralty Fleet Orders, Sir Oswyn Murray was away on leave, but, in accordance with the usual practice, both the Admiralty Fleet Order announcing the cuts in pay and the Admiralty letter explaining the pay cuts were issued over the name of Sir Oswyn Murray as Secretary of the Admiralty.

Of the Sea Lords, Admiral Sir Frederick Field, the First Sea Lord, had held that appointment for fourteen months. When the economic crisis arose, Admiral Sir Frederick Field was on leave, and suffering from ill health. He was, however, in London, and he returned to his post at the Admiralty so soon as it became obvious that naval economies were inevitable.

Returning hurriedly from leave in a state of serious ill health, Admiral Sir Frederick Field was

in no condition to embark whole-heartedly upon a battle with the Treasury and the whole weight of the Government on behalf of the men of the Royal Navy. Moreover, his position had been weakened in face of the politicians, because the Sea Lords had been twice overridden by the politicians in the past two years—once in the cruiser question during the London Naval Conference, and again after the “incident” in H.M.S. *Lucia*. If these factors are taken into consideration, and due weight is given to the fact that the First Sea Lord was a naval officer—easily persuaded in the moment of crisis that true patriotism lay in support of the Government at all costs—the approval of the Board of Admiralty for the reductions in the pay of the Royal Navy begins to become more comprehensible.

The Second Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Personnel was Admiral Sir Cyril Fuller. When the mutiny broke out in the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon Admiral Sir Cyril Fuller was on leave at his home in Yorkshire.

The Third Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse, who is at present Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, was also away on leave at this time.

The Fourth Sea Lord was Vice-Admiral Lionel Preston. He was at the Admiralty when the reductions in pay were under consideration at the Admiralty. He protested strongly against reductions being effected by the enforcement of any universal

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application of the 1925 rates of pay. So strongly did he feel on this point that he asked to be allowed to resign his appointment as Fourth Sea Lord, but he was overridden. The other member of the Board of Admiralty which approved the introduction of the cuts in pay which led to the mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon was Vice-Admiral Frederick Dreyer, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.

Not one of the distinguished naval officers who were members of the Board of Admiralty in September 1931 would wittingly have betrayed the men of the Royal Navy or been party to any action likely to damage the prestige and morale of the Royal Navy. Such naval members of the Board of Admiralty who were present, and formed the quorum which approved the enforcement of the reductions in pay, were rushed into it.

Naval officers are ill equipped to understand the implications and repercussions of an economic crisis of the magnitude of that of 1931. It was obvious that something had to be done to save the country, and that sacrifices would have to be made by all sections of the community. Having given their opinion to the Cabinet that reductions in naval pay would only be acceptable if all other sections of the community were called upon to make precisely similar sacrifices, these high naval officers were honestly of the opinion that the Government proposed to impose precisely similar reductions upon the unemployed and upon all Government servants. The economies

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might have been enforced before, and given more mature consideration, had it not been for the political crisis and the fact that the Government wasted valuable time in waiting upon the deliberations of the Trades Union Council at Bristol. As it was, everything was left to the last moment. It was not until the financial leaders of the country had been forced to present to the Government what amounted almost to an ultimatum demanding instant retrenchment that inaction was suddenly replaced by a mad rush to enforce economies. There was then no time for consideration. The Board of Admiralty was rushed, and opposition to the enforcement of the reductions in pay was squashed by the cry of patriotism. To resign in protest would only have been further to embarrass the hard-pressed Government and force the nation even nearer to the cataclysm.

It was in such an atmosphere that the agitation and intrigue of six years came suddenly to fruition. The reduction of the naval rates of pay by the universal application of the 1925 scales of pay received the approval of the Board of Admiralty. The unbelievable had happened.

In Parliament, the Government's Economy Bill was introduced on the day the ships of the Atlantic Fleet left their home ports in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. The men were, therefore, away from newspapers and out of touch with happenings ashore which affected them very deeply.

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In the Admiralty, a letter explaining the reductions in pay was written and sent to the Fleet. That letter was dated September 10th, and was designed to make explanation to the men on Friday, September 11th—the day before the Admiralty Fleet Orders announcing the enforcement of the pay cuts would reach any of the ships. Through an amazing chain of circumstances, this letter of explanation did not reach the Atlantic Fleet ships at Invergordon until mutiny had broken out and taken such a hold that it could not be broken by mere explanations. The War Office had taken steps to ensure that the reductions in pay and their cause were fully explained to all ranks. The Admiralty tried to do the same thing, but failed owing to a breakdown in organisation.

VIII

FATE AND FOLLY

IN the Atlantic Fleet, too, Fate and Folly were combining and playing into the hands of those elements which had long been preparing for attack upon the greatest disciplinary organisation the world has ever known. The stage was being set for mutiny.

The ships of the Atlantic Fleet left their home ports on Monday, September 7th, and Tuesday, September 8th. The last ships to leave their home ports and steam north with the Fleet left harbour two days before the Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in pay was drafted in the Admiralty.

The first ships to leave their home ports were those from Devonport. These ships sailed on the night of Monday, September 7th, and it was in these ships that the germs of unrest were most active. It was in this part of the Fleet, moreover, that there existed, in the hands of certain disaffected men on the lower deck, plans and organisation for a mutiny to take place if and when opportunity offered.

When the ships of the Atlantic Fleet left their home ports and sailed northwards their ships' companies were already in a state of great uncertainty and uneasiness. The men had just been on leave. They had come into contact with all manner of

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agitators whose business it was to make the maximum political capital out of the report of the May Committee on Economy and the obvious need for retrenchment. Under these influences the sailors had discussed the prospects of the future with their wives and families. Family budgets had been anxiously drafted and re-drafted. Payments due on rent or house-purchase, on the hire-purchase of furniture, on insurance, and on all the other factors making up the cost of living for the sailors' families, had been reviewed. As a result, most of the men had formed an idea of the extent of any reduction in pay which they could contemplate without the spectre of ruin rearing itself over their homes. In the absence of any definite knowledge of the reductions in prospect there was much uneasiness and one simple certainty—that the reductions recommended by the May Committee would mean ruin to the family life of many men.

In view of this general uneasiness it was absolutely essential that officers in command should have full knowledge of the measures of economy contemplated by the Government so far as the Royal Navy was concerned. This was appreciated at the Admiralty, and a signal had been sent to the naval Commanders-in-Chief all over the world. This signal explained the position of the Government and the financial state of the country, and it indicated that heavy sacrifices were to be demanded from the officers and men of the Royal Navy.

That signal was received by every Commander-in-Chief in the world except the Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet. The signal was received in H.M.S. *Nelson*, flag-ship of Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, on the day before Sir Michael Hodges returned from leave. Being a signal demanding the personal attention of the Commander-in-Chief, it was retained on board pending his return.

But when Sir Michael Hodges returned from leave he did not see the Admiralty signal. Immediately on his return from leave he became very seriously ill. It at once became obvious that he could not sail for Scottish waters in command of the Fleet, and he was rushed to the great naval hospital at Haslar suffering from pleurisy, which was threatening his heart.

This was only the day before the ships of the Fleet were due to sail for the north. The sailing of the Fleet as a whole was not delayed or cancelled. Rear-Admiral Wilfrid Tomkinson, commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron, with his flag flying in H.M.S. *Hood*, was the next senior Flag Officer in the Atlantic Fleet, and he was ordered to take command of the Fleet and sail according to programme, and carry out the exercises which had been arranged for the passage north. The only ship which was to be left behind was H.M.S. *Nelson*, the flag-ship of Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, carrying all the Commander-in-Chief's staff.

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The sudden illness of Sir Michael Hodges, and the consequent change in the command of the Atlantic Fleet, led to confusion in which matters of the utmost importance were overlooked. There was no time to do anything thoroughly, for only a few hours elapsed between the admission of Sir Michael Hodges to Haslar Hospital and the sailing of the Fleet. In those few hours Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had to readjust his whole outlook and learn what he could of the plans and organisation of the Commander-in-Chief. He was, of course, conversant with the orders for the exercises to be carried out during the passage north, but he had studied them from the point of view of the Admiral commanding a single squadron of two ships. Now he had to view them from the far wider angle of the Commander-in-Chief. Moreover, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson did not have at his disposal the assistance normally given to a Commander-in-Chief by his Chief-of-the-Staff and his staff organisation. The Chief-of-the-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Rear-Admiral R. M. Colvin, and the whole of the Commander-in-Chief's staff remained in H.M.S. *Nelson* at Portsmouth while Rear-Admiral Tomkinson sailed with the remainder of the Fleet.

Normally, the turning over of one Commander-in-Chief to another occupies several days, and the staff is turned over as a working organisation to a new Commander-in-Chief. Under the exceptional circumstances brought about by the sudden illness

of Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson received virtually no turn-over at all. He did get an opportunity of paying one short visit to Sir Michael Hodges in hospital, but at this meeting the talk was all of the forthcoming exercises. It must be remembered that Sir Michael Hodges was then seriously ill. Moreover, he was not in a position to speak to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson about the projected reductions in pay, because he had not seen the Admiralty signal. The signal remained in the office of the Commander-in-Chief in H.M.S. *Nelson*. This would appear to be a serious breakdown in organisation. It was; but it must be remembered that the signal was addressed to the Commander-in-Chief. In the hurry of the change in command the true importance of that signal was not appreciated. Thus Rear-Admiral Tomkinson sailed in command of the Fleet without having any inkling of the most important event which was to take place within a few days.

It has always been a source of wonder to laymen that a mutiny as serious as that at Invergordon was confined to that portion of a single fleet which was lying in a Scottish firth. The reductions in the naval pay affected the whole Navy, yet it was only the men of those ships at Invergordon which mutinied. In reality, there was nothing surprising in this. In fact, it appears inevitable when a number of factors are taken into account.

In the first place, the preparatory signal from the

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Admiralty, and the Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in pay, was received in all other commands before the news of the imposition of the pay cuts reached the men. The men thus received explanation first instead of being faced with a *fait accompli*, as were the men of the Atlantic Fleet. The men of the Atlantic Fleet ships, moreover, had very recently been in touch with their families and with subversive propaganda: and this during a period of anxious uncertainty. The heavy ships of the Atlantic Fleet, moreover, changed one-third of their complements every three months. The result was that there was a general lack of *esprit de corps*, and officers were unavoidably out of touch with a large section of their men. One such change had taken place only a few weeks before the mutiny broke out, and there is no doubt that during this change a number of disaffected men were drafted to the ships of the Atlantic Fleet, there to join and strengthen the "cells" of subversive influence which had been carefully fostered for more than two years.

The assembly of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon was also the largest naval assembly in the world at the time the reductions in pay were introduced. The ships of the Mediterranean Fleet, the other large fleet of the British Navy, were then spread about at ports all over the Eastern Mediterranean, for they were in the midst of their summer cruising period. At Rosyth, in the Firth of Forth,

when mutiny broke out at Invergordon, were anchored the destroyers and submarines of the Atlantic Fleet, and the battleship *Iron Duke*, demilitarised under the London Naval Treaty of 1930, and used as a training-ship. None of these ships, although units of the Atlantic Fleet, took part in the mutiny. This was because the quality of the petty officers and men in the small ships such as destroyers and submarines was much superior to those in the capital ships and cruisers of the Atlantic Fleet. Submarines, and, to a lesser extent, destroyers are manned by picked men. Moreover, the smallness of the ships brings officers and men into far closer touch than is possible in a large ship. The result is that if a disaffected element makes its appearance in these small vessels it is speedily detected and eradicated. H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, as a training-ship, also had a special complement consisting largely of picked petty officers and men.

When the ships of the Home Fleet sailed for Scottish waters under the command of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson there sailed with him two other flag officers. These were Rear-Admiral E. A. Astley-Rushton, commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron, with his flag flying in H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, and Rear-Admiral W. F. French, Rear-Admiral of the Second Battle Squadron, with his flag flying in H.M.S. *Warspite*.

On the passage north the exercises which had

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been planned were carried out as if the Commander-in-Chief had been present, although they had to be very slightly modified owing to the absence of one battleship (*H.M.S. Nelson*). The aircraft carrier *H.M.S. Courageous* was also absent from the Fleet, having been retained at Portsmouth for the seaplane race for the Schneider Trophy, which was due to take place on Saturday, September 12th. But the absence of this ship had been taken into account when the exercises were arranged.

Chief of the exercises which were carried out by the Atlantic Fleet on its passage north, which lasted three days and three nights, was a large-scale convoy exercise. For the purpose of this exercise the Fleet was divided into two opposing sides, "Red" and "Blue."

"Red" had an important convoy, consisting of the submarine depot ships, *H.M.S. Lucia* and *H.M.S. Adamant*, steaming north and escorted by the battleships *H.M.S. Rodney*, *H.M.S. Warspite*, *H.M.S. Malaya*, the light cruiser *H.M.S. Centaur*, the minelaying cruiser *H.M.S. Adventure*, and the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla. "Red" also had four submarines operating off Lowestoft. The "Blue" fleet consisted of the battle cruisers *H.M.S. Hood* and *H.M.S. Repulse*, the battleship *H.M.S. Valiant*, the cruisers *H.M.S. Dorsetshire*, *H.M.S. Norfolk*, and *H.M.S. York*, and the Sixth Destroyer Flotilla. Its object was to detect and destroy the "red" convoy.

This exercise began during the night of September

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8/9th and continued throughout the following day and night. Squadron manœuvring exercises and other drills were carried out throughout the day of September 10th, and after dark the heavy ships of the Fleet were subjected to attacks by the destroyer flotillas. On Friday, September 11th, more training exercises were carried out during the forenoon, and in the afternoon the main body of the Fleet arrived at Invergordon.

It will be seen that, even had any matters of policy been to the fore during the voyage north, there would have been no time for their mature consideration by the officer in command and conducting the exercises. It must be remembered that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had been suddenly pitchforked by circumstance into the position of commanding the whole Fleet at the moment of sailing—at a time when he was fully preoccupied with the problems of his own squadron. Actually, no questions of policy arose. Officers and men knew, of course, that economies of some sort would have to be made in the near future, but there was no official hint of the form these economies were likely to take, or when they were to be expected. The only inkling that pay was to be reduced had come in the Press reports of the recommendations of the May Economy Committee. But, while there was much apprehension in the Fleet, there was, among many officers and men, a feeling that the official silence on the question of naval economies indicated that,

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for the present at least, the pay of the Royal Navy would not be the target for economy. This belief was somewhat strengthened by the knowledge of the assurances given by the Admiralty in the days of Lord Beatty's tenure of office as First Sea Lord that the 1925 rates of pay would not be applied to men who had entered the Navy before these rates of pay came into force. It was not lost upon the men that these assurances completely nullified the recommendations of the May Economy Committee.

On the other hand, there were many influences tending to increase uneasiness and to build up the determination of the men to resist cuts on the basis of the recommendation of the May Economy Committee, should there be any attempt to enforce such reductions. During the passage north, whenever men came off watch, they made their way to the recreation spaces, where they could smoke and talk or read. In practically every ship radio was fitted in the recreation spaces and the men listened to the suave voice of the B.B.C. announcer, interrupted every now and then by the sharp staccato of Morse as a signal was made or received, talking at frequent intervals on the theme of the financial crisis and the imperative need for economy.

This was the only news received by the men during the three days and three nights of the passage up the North Sea, and it was used to great effect by the subversive elements in the ships. Every time the B.B.C. news bulletin stressed the crisis, and the

urgency of the need for economy, and when Ministers spoke of sacrifices to be endured by all, the members of the subversive "cells" would say, "There you are. What did I tell you? They are going to cut our pay so that our families will starve—unless we do something to stop it." They also stressed the fact that protest through the ordinary Service channels would be useless.

In this they got a ready hearing, for it had been demonstrated time and again that their own officers were powerless in the face of political bureaucracy. It had been proved that a question in the House of Commons from a back bench Member of Parliament carried far more weight than the strongest recommendation of a full admiral, and it had been demonstrated that the disciplinary action of naval officers could easily be overridden as the result of a question in the House of Commons.

Such a case had recently occurred in H.M.S. *Rodney*. A man had been disgraced as punishment. A question had been asked in the House of Commons. An order had been received, and the captain of H.M.S. *Rodney* had been forced to reinstate the man. Small wonder that discipline and the influence of the officers were at a low ebb.

The officers were aware, to some extent at least, of the general atmosphere of anxiety on the lower deck. But from Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, in command of the Fleet, to the most junior

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midshipman, they were completely in the dark as to the intentions of the Admiralty. In the circumstances, all they could do was to foster the belief among the men that the full recommendation of the May Economy Committee—the universal application of the 1925 rates of pay—would not be enforced. As it turned out, this was the worst thing which could have been done, for it led later to the belief among certain ratings that the officers had purposely been misleading them.

The Admiralty cannot escape blame for not ensuring that the officers of the Atlantic Fleet, and particularly the officer in command of that Fleet, were aware of the fact that reductions in pay were imminent, and the extent of those reductions.

The Admiralty knew of the sudden illness of Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, and the hasty assumption of the command by Rear-Admiral Tomkinson. It was well aware that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, not being the Commander-in-Chief, had not been consulted by the Admiralty when the question of reducing the rates of the pay of the Royal Navy had been mooted during the tenure of office of the Labour Government. Yet no special steps were taken to ensure that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was provided with the "background" which was so essential if he were to deal effectively with a situation which the Board of Admiralty had warned the Cabinet might arise if reductions of a certain type

were enforced. Under the circumstances, extra precautions should have been taken by the Admiralty to demonstrate to the Fleet that it was acting, so far as the power lay with it, in the best interests of the Royal Navy and of the men serving in that service. At the very least, special precautions should have been taken to make sure that the reductions in the naval pay did not come as an unexpected bombshell, falling upon ground which had not been prepared by explanation or an appeal for loyalty and co-operation.

Special precautions were not taken, and a breakdown in departmental organisation in the Admiralty led to the news of the cuts being first received by the men from reports in the Press and without any official confirmation or explanation.

On the Thursday, September 10th, the Admiralty issued a letter explaining the reductions in pay which would be introduced by Admiralty Fleet Orders which would "shortly" be issued. It was intended by the Admiralty that this letter would be received and distributed to all ships so that the explanation of the pay cuts and the Admiralty's appeal for loyal co-operation would be given to all the men of the Royal Navy on Friday, September 11th. The Admiralty Fleet Orders would not reach any ship before Saturday, September 12th, at the earliest.

It is noteworthy that this Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in pay was dated at the

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Admiralty on Thursday, September 10th—two days after the Government's Economy Bill had been formally introduced to Parliament.

The real tragedy of this official explanation, however, was not that it might have been written earlier, but that departmental muddle in the Admiralty caused it to be so delayed that it did not reach Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, in command of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon, until the night of Monday, September 14th—three days after full explanation of the reductions in pay should have been made to the men of the Fleet—after the Admiralty Fleet Orders enforcing the reductions had been received and after details of the cuts in pay had been seen in the Press by the men. By that time the Fleet was already on the verge of open mutiny. Plans for the mutiny and the establishment of a "sailors' soviet" had already matured. The letter was too late.

The normal procedure for the issue of any document to the ships of a Fleet is for the documents to be sent in bulk from the Admiralty to the offices of the Commander-in-Chief. The Commander-in-Chief then arranges distribution to the various ships under his command.

The letter had been written on Thursday, September 10th, and it was issued on that day. It was passed in draft to the copying-rooms of the Admiralty and thence to the "Registry" for immediate issue to the Fleet.

Although the Admiralty knew that the Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet was seriously ill in hospital, and that his flag-ship, H.M.S. *Nelson*, had been left behind at Portsmouth when the rest of the Fleet sailed for Invergordon, there was lack of appreciation of these special circumstances in the Admiralty departments through which the letter passed before issue. Instead of special steps being taken to deal with the abnormal situation which had arisen, the routine was faithfully followed. The letter was sent by the Admiralty to H.M.S. *Nelson* addressed to the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet, and no further issue of the letter was made to the Rear-Admiral commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron in H.M.S. *Hood*, who was then acting as Commander-in-Chief. Thus it was that that all-important Admiralty letter did not reach the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon until too late.

The staff of the Commander-in-Chief in H.M.S. *Nelson* might have realised that this important document had been sent to H.M.S. *Nelson* in error, and have asked the Admiralty whether copies had also been sent to H.M.S. *Hood* direct, but officers who question the efficiency of the Admiralty organisation are apt to think that they may incur unpopularity in high places which may reflect directly and disastrously upon their careers. Moreover, the staff of the Commander-in-Chief in H.M.S. *Nelson* knew that the Admiralty was aware of the special

circumstances which had arisen, and the change in command which had been so hastily effected. To the staff of the Commander-in-Chief in H.M.S. *Nelson* it was unbelievable that the Admiralty should have failed to act upon this knowledge in so important a matter. Thus the copies of the Admiralty letter were retained in H.M.S. *Nelson*, and did not reach Rear-Admiral Tomkinson until after the arrival of H.M.S. *Nelson* at Invergordon.

Meanwhile the Admiralty took no further action beyond the drafting and issuing of the Admiralty Fleet Orders which were to bring the reductions of pay into force. If there was any nervousness regarding the outcome of the introduction of the pay cuts—as there might well have been in view of the warning of their probable effect which had been given to the Cabinet by the Board of Admiralty some time before—it did not show itself. The Admiralty had done its best and carried out the regulations. A long and full letter explaining the cuts had been drafted, and copied, and issued, and the Admiralty remained in blissful ignorance of the fact that this letter had failed to reach those ships in which the danger of disaffection was greatest.

The Government, on the other hand, was completely preoccupied by the hostile reception accorded to the proposed reductions in salaries by other Government servants. Chief among these were the school-teachers, although opposition also came

from the police and the post-office workers. Statements made by Mr. Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were challenged on all sides. The National Union of Teachers and the Educational Institute of Scotland, with a joint membership of 165,000, resolved to write to members of Parliament and to lobby them in order to secure a rejection of the proposed reduction in salaries. The Lancashire County Teachers' Association—the largest association in the National Union of Teachers—called for a moratorium. Mr. F. Mander, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, stated: "Our members are seething with discontent at the inequality of the sacrifices they are being called upon to make."

The police also received the proposals for the reductions in their wages with indignation, and put forward counter proposals through the medium of the *Police Chronicle*. In the post office, hostility to the proposed reductions in salaries was stiffened because that department had for several years provided a surplus of about £10,000,000 for the Treasury. Among the unemployed, too, there was much indignation, and mass meetings were held in all the industrial centres. When Parliament had reopened on September 8th, Old Palace Yard had been packed to capacity. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, added to the indignation by refusing to receive a deputation. Up and down the country there were frequent, though happily not serious,

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clashes between the police and demonstrators. A large number of unemployed marched on Bristol, where the General Council of the Trades Union Council was in session. This led to baton charges by the police in which several people were hurt and many arrests were made.

On September 10th, the day on which the Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in naval pay was written, and while the ships of the Atlantic Fleet were still carrying out exercises in the North Sea on their passage to Scotland, Mr. Snowden introduced his emergency budget. On the same day the Treasury issued a circular letter to all Government Departments calling upon them to make a stringent review of all expenditure with a view to allowing further economies to be effected.

In the midst of this rush of events the ships and the men of the Atlantic Fleet were forgotten. They had steamed away to the north and been crowded out of the public mind by greater and more vociferous communities.

IX

GROWTH OF PSYCHOLOGY OF MUTINY

ON Friday morning, September 11th, the destroyers and submarines of the Atlantic Fleet, together with H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, separated from the main body of the Fleet and entered the Firth of Forth, where they came to their moorings off the disused war-time dockyard of Rosyth. The remainder of the Fleet—that is, the battleships, battle cruisers, and cruisers—continued northwards.

That afternoon these ships—the principal units of the Atlantic Fleet—entered Cromarty Firth, the long inlet guarded by the high headlands known as the Sutors. It was an afternoon of dead calm—one of those days when the tide causes the only ripples on a surface which mirrors the surrounding hills in the grey water. So still was it that orders in one ship could be plainly heard in another, and the ripples at the forefoot of a slowly moving battleship seemed a violation of a stillness which had endured for months. Half-way between the little greystone town of Invergordon and the village of Nigg, on the northern shore near the entrance to the Firth, the ships passed the rusty and weed-grown bones of what had once been a ship, with a spindle-legged beacon straddled on the whaleback

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of her bilge. As each ship passed this wreck, men were called to attention and the boatswain's pipes shrilled the "Still." The wreck was that of H.M.S. *Natal*, which blew up in mysterious circumstances during the war, when a children's party and cinema show were being given on board. When British warships pass they salute one another by sounding the "Still" and calling the ships' company to attention. Nearly fifteen years after the tragedy which had lost the lives of many brave men and innocent children the time-honoured naval compliment was still paid to all that remained of H.M.S. *Natal*.

After passing the forlorn wreck the ships steamed to their appointed anchorages. Only the battle cruiser *Repulse* moored in the lower anchorage off Nigg. Normally this is the appointed anchorage for the battle cruisers and aircraft carriers. There were no aircraft-carriers with the Atlantic Fleet in September 1931, H.M.S. *Courageous* having been retained at Portsmouth for the seaplane race for the Schneider Trophy. H.M.S. *Hood*, in her position of flag-ship of the Admiral commanding the Fleet, went up to the berth normally occupied by the Fleet flag-ship.

This berth, which is just off the pier of Invergordon, is a battleship's berth, and H.M.S. *Hood*, 860 feet long, is 150 feet longer than H.M.S. *Nelson*, the usual flag-ship of the Atlantic Fleet. There was an element of doubt as to whether H.M.S. *Hood*

could occupy this berth without risk of fouling other ships. The captain of H.M.S. *Hood* was reluctant to accept the risk, but Rear-Admiral Tomkinson felt it his duty, in his new capacity in the command of the Fleet, to be at the flag-ship's buoy and thus in the centre of the fleet. He had himself been captain of the *Hood*, and therefore had experience of the length and handling capabilities of the ship, so he felt confident of his ability to fit H.M.S. *Hood* into the berth normally occupied by H.M.S. *Nelson*. By good seamanship the largest warship in the world was successfully manœuvred and secured to the Fleet flag-ship's buoy off Invergordon pier.

Next to H.M.S. *Hood*, H.M.S. *Rodney* secured to a buoy, then were moored H.M.S. *Warspite*, H.M.S. *Valiant*, and H.M.S. *Malaya*, in that order in the same line to seaward. South of this line was the line of cruisers, headed by H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron. In this line were moored H.M.S. *Norfolk*, H.M.S. *York*, and H.M.S. *Adventure*.

As soon as the ships of the Fleet were moored, boats went inshore to Invergordon carrying postmen to collect the mails and newspapers. Most of the more senior officers, who had listened with no little concern to the wireless news of the financial crisis and the call for sacrifice and economy, felt confident that in the mails waiting at Invergordon for the Fleet would be official explanation from the

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Admiralty of any economies which it was proposed to introduce.

But the postmen returned and no official intimations of any reductions in pay or other naval economies were among the mails. The official Admiralty letter announcing the fact that pay cuts were to be introduced, and explaining the necessity for, and the operation of, these reductions was still on board H.M.S. *Nelson*, which had sailed on this day from Portsmouth to join the rest of the Fleet at Invergordon. Not a single officer in any of the ships at Invergordon even knew of the existence of the Admiralty letter.

The postmen brought back the newspapers to the ships. These were seized and eagerly devoured. On the lower deck in many ships the news they contained was suitably explained and embellished by the members of the subversive "cells" among the crews.

It was the day after the introduction of the emergency budget by Mr. Philip Snowden. The newspapers were full of it, and full of the enormous sacrifices which were to be borne by all sections of the community in order to prevent the pound sterling going the way of the German mark. Not a few newspapers, taking their cue from the fact that King George V had voluntarily imposed upon himself a cut of £50,000 in his Civil List, set out to eulogise the fellowship of sacrifice.

Among the men of the lower deck in the ships at

Invergordon such eulogies evoked bitter laughter. The uncertainty of the past four days was gradually being replaced by the conviction that the men were, after all, to be let down, and forced to suffer reductions in pay which they well knew, after discussions with their wives and families, to be insupportable in the conditions then ruling at the home ports where lay their homes.

In nearly every ship at Invergordon this belief was carefully fostered and encouraged by the few men who were already disaffected and playing the part of agitators working in secret. In some ships these men had far more influence than in others. This was partly due to the fact that the ships' companies of some ships were, as a whole, more receptive to subversive propaganda than others, and partly due to the differing personalities of the agitators themselves.

Another most important fact which the newspapers brought home to the men of the Fleet, and which was used to great effect by the agitators, was that the collective objections raised by the school-teachers, the police, the post-office workers, and the unemployed, had brought their cases well into the limelight of politics where there was every prospect of reductions in the cuts being made on grounds of political expediency or necessity. It must not be forgotten that during the preceding few years events had shown the men of the lower deck of the Royal Navy that real power rested, not with admirals, but with private Members of Parliament.

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From these Press reports of agitation against reductions in the salaries of other sections of the community, and the probability of their success, the sailors of the Fleet perceived that collective action would be the only way of making effective protest if the reductions in pay which they feared were actually enforced. The collective action of the school-teachers and others looked as if it might force the Government to reconsider the cuts imposed upon those sections of the community. If one section of the community could employ collective action with such good chance of success, why not another section of the community? If the teachers and the police, why not the men of the Royal Navy? This idea was sedulously spread by the more turbulent spirits on the lower deck.

There was another aspect of the reaction to this news of agitation among other sections of Government employees against reductions in their pay and salaries. If, as seemed probable, the agitation had some effect, and the Government were forced to remit a proportion of the cuts imposed upon the more vociferous sections of the Government servants, it would mean that the Government would find itself in an even greater quandary, and would have to search even more desperately for economies. In such circumstances it might well be that even greater sacrifices might be imposed upon those whose Service forbade agitation and collective action. In any case, a Government hard pressed

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financially, and cornered by collective action on the part of bodies of considerable political significance, would hardly be likely to lend a sympathetic ear to requests for readjustments received in orderly fashion through the "usual Service channels." Realisation of this fact, and the stressing of it by the subversive elements in the Fleet, played no small part in bringing about the mutiny.

In spite of all the subversive propaganda which was being ceaselessly carried on in practically every ship of the Atlantic Fleet, however, there were still only comparatively few men who favoured the policy of mutiny—or "collective strike action," to give it the better sounding name given by the agitators. The vast majority of the men, trained to naval discipline and naval ideals, steadfastly refused, in the absence of any official news, to believe that the heads of the Royal Navy could have betrayed them to the extent of imposing reductions in pay against which former Boards of Admiralty had fought successfully.

Nevertheless, the anxiety and the uncertainty, constantly worked upon by the subversive elements on the mess decks and in the recreation spaces of every ship, was steadily undermining the innate loyalty of thousands of men. In a word, the psychology in which mutiny is possible was being slowly but surely built up among men who in normal times were intensely loyal.

In building up this dangerous frame of mind the

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forces of disaffection and disruption were assisted to an incalculable degree by the breakdown in the Admiralty organisation. A great many men consulted their officers on the subject of their pay and the proposed reductions, but the officers at this critical time were unable to give any guidance or advice, because they were themselves completely ignorant of the action or policy of the Government and the Admiralty. In fact, it is not too much to say that at this juncture the men on the lower deck, through the medium of the agitators and disaffected elements, had a far more accurate idea of the forthcoming reductions in pay than had the officers. This has led to a widespread belief among naval officers that there was a leakage of information on this subject from the Admiralty to the minions of revolution. There is no definite evidence that there was any such leakage. It seems more probable that the agitators made a lucky guess in seizing upon the full recommendations of the May Committee on Economy as a basis for their subversive work among the men of the Fleet. At the same time it must be conceded that officials of the Communist Party were aware that there had been, in the past three months, increased agitation on the part of the Treasury to secure the application of the 1925 rates of naval pay to all naval ratings.

In some ships the effect of the agitators was afterwards far more apparent than in others. Young ordinary seamen, who had entered the Royal Navy

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after 1925 and were therefore paid on the 1925 rates of pay, were unaffected by the reductions in pay which were proposed. These men, varying in age from eighteen to twenty-one, were more impressionable to subversive propaganda than were the older able seamen, leading seamen, and petty officers, who were directly affected by the pay cuts.

In some ships the young ordinary seamen proved the most dangerous element in the mutiny. Many of the younger men in the Royal Marines also succumbed to the influences of the agitators to a far greater degree than would have been expected. It is worthy of note that many of the Royal Marines who took an active part in the mutiny were men who had started life as miners in the coal-fields of South Wales and elsewhere, and who had joined the Royal Marines during the sudden recruiting drive of 1921.

In face of recurrent and wild rumours and the total absence of any official orders or guidance, the question of economies and of reductions in pay was debated in every mess and upon every forecastle throughout the Fleet, on its arrival at Invergordon. Shore leave was given to the watch off duty, and many men went ashore. The matter was discussed again, between men from different ships, in the canteen ashore. There was, even at this stage, a volatile element which was in favour of immediate and militant protest upon the basis of "collective

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strike action." This element, however, was still small and without power. The great majority of the sailors remained disinclined to believe the worst in face of silence from the Admiralty and the obvious perplexity of their own officers. This perplexity of the officers showed itself in every wardroom of the Fleet, and it was quickly reported on the lower deck by the officers' stewards and Royal Marines, who acted as wardroom attendants.

While the men of the Atlantic Fleet ships assembled at Invergordon were being submitted to perplexity and propaganda, Parliament had called a truce in the battle of the economies following upon the introduction of the emergency budget. Saturday, September 12th, was to be a day given over to a great sporting event of international importance—the seaplane race for the Schneider Trophy.

On that hot Saturday hundreds of thousands of people thronged the shores of Spithead and the Solent to witness the bullet-like seaplanes racing at speeds which in 1931 seemed almost incredible. Moored out at Spithead, acting as turning marks for the race, lay destroyers with enormous yellow and black chequered pylons erected upon their forecastles. At Spithead also, in a fine position for those on board to witness the race, was anchored the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Courageous*, a unit of the Atlantic Fleet. H.M.S. *Courageous* was to serve as grand stand for a number of official guests.

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Chief among the official guests of Admiral Sir Arthur Waistell, Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, were Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, and Sir Austen Chamberlain, the new First Lord of the Admiralty. These and other distinguished persons were ferried out from Portsmouth harbour to H.M.S. *Courageous* at Spithead in the destroyer *Winchester*.

A question was subsequently asked by a Socialist Member of Parliament in the House of Commons on the subject of this very expensive method of transporting official guests.

No sooner were the official guests on board the great aircraft carrier *Courageous* than the race for the Schneider Trophy was postponed. There was a stiff breeze, and the visibility was not sufficient to allow of the low flying of such fast machines without undue risk. For some little time the race was postponed from hour to hour. Then came the news that it would not take place that day.

It was not, however, a blank day for Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. He sized the opportunity of moving informally among the ship's company of H.M.S. *Courageous* upon the great expanse of the flying deck and in the aircraft hangars and mess decks. Every here and there he stopped and spoke to little groups of men, explaining to them in his resonant Scottish voice the financial crisis which had overtaken the country, the urgent need for sacrifice and economy on the part of all good citizens, and the

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reductions in the pay of the Royal Navy which the crisis had forced upon the Government.

It must be remembered that this took place on Saturday, September 12th—the day after the official Admiralty explanation of the reductions in pay had been conveyed to the men in all the ships of the Royal Navy except those of the Atlantic Fleet in Scottish waters. The copies of the Admiralty letter intended for these ships had left Portsmouth only the day before in H.M.S. *Nelson*.

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald then left H.M.S. *Courageous* and went to Chequers for the week-end. He did not remain in Portsmouth to see the postponed race for the Schneider Trophy which took place on the following day.

The action of the Prime Minister in thus informally explaining the reductions in naval pay to the men of H.M.S. *Courageous*, and pleading with them for their loyal co-operation in this time of acute financial crisis, is significant for two reasons.

H.M.S. *Courageous* is a large ship with a complement of more than 1,200 officers and men. She was a unit of the Atlantic Fleet, and her crew had very recently been on leave and in contact with subversive propaganda and with anxious and worried wives and families. The peculiar construction and duties of an aircraft carrier make close contact between officers and men more difficult than in any other type of warship, and H.M.S. *Courageous* had been commissioned at Devonport a year before.

Moreover, under the system of dual Admiralty and Air Ministry control of the Fleet Air Arm the maintenance of discipline in aircraft carriers was always difficult, because one section of the personnel owed allegiance to the Admiralty, and another owed allegiance to the Air Ministry, although serving temporarily under the Naval Discipline Act. In H.M.S. *Courageous* there were 748 officers and men of the Royal Navy and 468 officers and men of the Royal Air Force.

If disaffection were to show itself in serious proportions in the ships of the Royal Navy, one would have expected it to appear first in such a ship as H.M.S. *Courageous*. Yet in H.M.S. *Courageous* disaffection never assumed serious proportions. In face of the Admiralty explanation of the reduction in pay, and, to an even greater extent, of the personal explanation and appeal of the Prime Minister, the voices of the subversive elements made very little headway with the men.

The fact that the Prime Minister went about among the men of H.M.S. *Courageous* at this critical time prompts the question of whether it was mere opportunism on his part or whether it was done because there was in Whitehall and in Downing Street an appreciation of the fact that the imposition of the pay cuts might lead to grave disaffection in the Royal Navy. If it was opportunism, it was a singularly wise action, arising out of a most fortunate opportunity—the one thing which went right

when everything else seemed to be going wrong. If, on the other hand, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was acting in a conscious effort to avert a calamity which he had reason to fear to be imminent, this incident in H.M.S. *Courageous* would seem to offer confirmation of the assertion of Mr. A. V. Alexander, the ex-First Lord of the Admiralty, that the Cabinet had been warned by the Admiralty that the imposition of the cuts recommended by the May Economy Committee would lead to a dangerous degree of disaffection among the men of the Royal Navy.

When Mr. Alexander made his assertion in the House of Commons, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald retorted that the advice of the Admiralty had been to the effect that the men of the Royal Navy would loyally accept reductions in pay provided that cuts were imposed upon all the public services and upon unemployment benefit. At the same time the Prime Minister made it clear that he was speaking only from memory. In fact, his memory was serving him well. The advice which he claimed had been tendered to the Government by the Admiralty—that cuts would be acceptable provided similar cuts were imposed upon all Government servants—had been given by the Admiralty. But that was at the time when, under pressure from the Treasury and from the whole Government, the reductions in pay were rushed through the Board of Admiralty “to save the country.” Mr. Alexander’s claim,

however, referred to an earlier date, when the reduction of naval pay by the universal application of the 1925 rate of pay had first been mooted, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's memory did not appear to extend to this earlier date.

The theory that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald went to H.M.S. *Courageous* on Saturday, September 12th, more with a view to having informal contacts with the men of the lower deck of the Navy than with a view to seeing the seaplane race for the Schneider Trophy, gains support from the fact that the Prime Minister did not remain in Portsmouth to watch the race on the following day. The following day was Sunday. Parliament was not sitting on that day, and, had there been important Ministerial business in the midst of the financial crisis, one would have expected the Prime Minister to hasten back to Downing Street. He did not return to London: he went to Chequers for the remainder of the week-end. Moreover, at that moment there was a lull in the "economic blizzard," for the introduction of Mr. Snowden's very severe budget had proved a steadying influence, and had led to an abrupt return of a measure of confidence abroad in the inherent financial stability of Great Britain.

Whatever the reasons for the action of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald on board H.M.S. *Courageous* on Saturday, September 12th, this was the only occasion throughout the period following the announcement of the forthcoming reductions in

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naval pay, and preceding the inquiries following the mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon, upon which any appreciation of the difficulties and sacrifices being demanded from the men of the Royal Navy was shown by any Government official.

At Invergordon, Saturday, September 12th, was a day full of significance. The usual routine of cleaning the ships for Sunday was carried out in an atmosphere of growing uncertainty and anxiety. There was still a lack of any authentic news either in support or in denial of the host of rumours which were circulating, and growing wilder and wilder, as they passed from ship to ship through the medium of the crews of boats plying between the ships. On board the ships the question of reductions in pay formed the one topic of conversation.

Saturday afternoon was a "make and mend"—that is, a half holiday. Shore leave was given to one watch of the ship's company of every ship. Ashore there were many diversions. It was the day of the Invergordon Games, and there were also football matches between some of the ships. But after these games the men of the watch ashore of all the ships went to the big canteen. This was the usual meeting-place for the men from the various ships moored in the Firth, and it was to play an important part in the great mutiny which was then imminent.

At the canteen the men spoke of nothing else but the prospect of crippling reductions in pay. Among them the workers of the subversive "cells"

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moved about, fostering a growing indignation and a growing conviction that, should the worst come to the worst, the only effective protest would be "collective strike action" by the men of every ship in the Fleet. The psychology of mutiny was growing fast.

When the men returned to their ships soon after 9 p.m. there was considerable rowdiness on the crowded pier from which the liberty-men were embarking in their boats, and, after the crowded boats had left the pier, men continued to shout slogans to one another. As the gaps between boat and boat and between the boats and the pier widened, however, the shouting died and the men became again just the ordinary liberty-men returning from a spell ashore.

Nevertheless, the rowdyism and the shouting of slogans served to show how far matters had already gone towards mutiny. The shouting of the liberty-men at the pier was reported to the executive officers of some ships by the midshipmen in charge of the boats, but in most cases the more senior officers regarded these reports as alarmist exaggerations made unwittingly by impressionable youngsters. There was not an officer in the Fleet who had not at some time during his career known liberty-men to be noisy owing to some celebrations or other before returning to their ships. This view was borne out by the orderliness of the men once they approached their ships.

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During the three days immediately preceding the outbreak of mutiny the great majority of the officers of the ships at Invergordon appear to have been unable to grasp the significance of events or the approach of danger. There were, of course, exceptions, but among most officers there seemed to be a tendency to leave things alone in the belief that any fears which they might have entertained would prove groundless. In adopting this attitude individual officers cannot be blamed. They still remained in complete ignorance of the Admiralty's plans for naval economies, and they believed, with some justification, that no really serious step would be taken by the Admiralty or the Government before they had been informed. Moreover, the officers had been brought up in a naval tradition which regarded mutiny by British sailors as a virtual impossibility. Very few of them had had any experience even of minor cases of insubordination.

The promotion system, and the block in promotion which had existed in the Royal Navy ever since the days of the post-war reductions, also played its part. Promotion to the "brass hatted" ranks of commander and above was by arbitrary selection, and a single "black mark" could, and often did, ruin a career. To assume responsibility and to take a definite and strong line of action in any matter might lead to commendation and promotion, but it increased enormously the chances of securing a fatal "black mark." Thus among the majority of officers

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in the Fleet there had grown up a tendency to shelve responsibility whenever this could be done conveniently and unostentatiously. A great many naval officers had adopted the philosophy of "keeping their own yard arms clear" at the expense of the "yard arms" of others and of the best interests of the naval Service. For this one can hardly blame the officers. It was the fault of a system which had imposed conditions for which the best traditions of the Royal Navy were fundamentally unsuited.

When the liberty-men of the watch ashore returned to their ships on the evening of Saturday, September 12th, they were greeted by startling news from their shipmates of the watch on board. The British Broadcasting Corporation, in its news bulletin, had broadcast the fact that the pay of the Royal Navy was to be reduced in accordance with the wave of economy and mutual sacrifice which was sweeping the country. The announcement had been of the briefest, and it did not contain details of the way in which the various classes of ratings in the Navy would be affected.

This announcement in the wireless broadcast news gave a new fillip to rumour, which became the wilder because comparatively few men had heard and fully understood the brief announcement. The fact of the announcement was immediately seized upon by the agitators, who were quick to point out that the British Broadcasting Corporation was virtually a Government concern and would not

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therefore include in its news bulletins any announcement which did not have official sanction.

The question was hotly debated upon the mess decks of every ship at Invergordon, and the feeling of the men rose even higher. But still the time was not ripe for mutiny. Although the position of the steadier elements on the lower deck—men who refused to believe in the reductions in pay or consider any action of protest against them until they had received official confirmation of their fears—was materially weakened by the broadcast announcement, they continued to exercise a powerful restraining influence. Moreover, the plans of the agitators were not yet quite complete. The broadcast announcement had come as a surprise even to them.

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 12th, the Admiralty Fleet Orders announcing the forthcoming reductions in naval pay reached Invergordon. In accordance with the normal practice, they were in bulk consigned to the flag-ship. The preparatory signal regarding the pay cuts had not been received by Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, who was in command, and the letter containing the Admiralty explanation of the cuts was on board H.M.S. *Nelson*, somewhere in the North Sea. Since the issue of any Fleet Orders of great importance to the Fleet is always preceded by a signal from the Admiralty, there was no reason to believe that the orders received on board H.M.S. *Hood* contained

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anything more important than the usual orders about stores, modifications to material, the appointment of Admiralty agents, and the like. Accordingly hasty and abnormal steps were not taken to open and distribute the orders on that Saturday evening. The usual routine was followed, with the result that the orders were received in the ships at varying times from noon on Sunday onwards.

The usual practice is for the Admiralty to issue each Friday to the Press such Admiralty Fleet Orders as may be published. These orders are stamped "Not for publication before a.m. Saturday." Thus the newspaper offices in London received the orders giving details of the reductions in naval pay on the day before the orders arrived in bulk at Invergordon, and the newspapers published accounts of these pay cuts before the preparatory signal, the Admiralty letter of explanation, or the Fleet Orders announcing the pay cuts were received by the individual ships at Invergordon.

X

THE BIRTH OF THE SAILORS' SOVIET

ON the morning of Sunday, September 13th, the worst fears of the men in the ships at Invergordon were confirmed by the announcement in the newspapers of the proposed cuts in pay. A great proportion of the Sunday newspapers were given over to the Government's economy campaign, and the fight against it being put up by the teachers, police, post-office workers, and the unemployed, but they had also devoted space in their columns to the news of the reductions to be made in the pay of the fighting Services.

Under the headline "How Reductions will affect Fighting Services," the *News of the World* announced that "Admiralty Fleet Orders issued yesterday state that rates of naval full pay and consolidated salaries of £2,000 a year and upwards will be reduced by 10 per cent." The news item went on to state that the pay of officers drawing pay at rates less than £2,000 a year would be reduced by 11 per cent below the standard rate. Midshipmen and cadets were to be excepted from this revision, which would also not affect certain categories of retired and disability pay. "The pay of a chief petty officer or of a petty officer is reduced by 1s. a day. An able seaman's pay is reduced from 4s. to 3s. a day on his

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first being rated, but the reduction becomes slightly less as his seniority increases. The allowance made in lieu of grog is reduced from 21s. for three months to 15s."

This news item was linked with the statement that "the Army Council issued explanations yesterday of cuts to come into force on October 1st. The reductions apply only to soldiers enlisted or re-enlisted before October 26th, 1925."

The effect of such news items in the Sunday papers upon the men in the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon was profound. It had been one thing to give the minimum of credence to a broadcast announcement which had only been heard by a proportion of the men. It was quite another thing for an announcement to appear in cold print so that all men could read it. Besides, the newspapers quoted "Admiralty Fleet Orders issued yesterday." There could be no denying the authenticity of news bearing such a label.

Among the vast majority of the men who read the announcement in the Sunday newspapers there grew up the immediate conviction that the Admiralty and those in charge of naval affairs in Whitehall—men whose business it was, in their view, to combat the more sweeping demands of the Treasury and the Government of the day—had betrayed the personnel of the Royal Navy and shown no appreciation of the needs and feelings of the men whom they purported to represent.

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There was still no official news when the Sunday newspapers were received on board and eagerly read on the lower deck of the ships at Invergordon. The men had no standard by which to judge the reductions in pay beyond the excerpts from the Admiralty Fleet Orders which were published in the Press. These were eloquent. Officers drawing more than £2,000 a year were to be cut by 10 per cent. The men of the Fleet were by no means certain what officers drew £2,000 a year. It seemed to them a princely income, and they concluded, with justice, that this scale of pay referred only to flag officers. Actually it applied to comparatively few of them.

The newspapers reported that the scale of pay for other officers was to be 11 per cent below the standard rate instead of 8 per cent below the standard rate, which was the scale ruling at that time. In other words, according to the simple arithmetic of the mess decks, officers' pay was to be cut by amounts varying from 10 to 3 per cent. Yet the announcements in the Sunday newspapers, published with the full authenticity of being able to quote Admiralty Fleet Orders, stated that the pay of an able seaman, recently promoted to that rating, was to be reduced from 4s. a day to 3s. a day. On the mess decks of the ships at Invergordon there was only one opinion about this reduction in pay—the obvious opinion in face of lack of explanation—that it represented a 25 per cent reduction for able

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seamen. This seemed to them grossly unfair, particularly in view of the much smaller percentage reductions which were apparently to be imposed upon the officers.

When one regards the announcements without the qualification of official orders and explanations, one is forced to admit that the interpretation placed upon the newspaper announcements was inevitable. The apparent discrepancy in the reductions imposed upon the officers and upon the men of the lower deck were, of course, immediately seized upon by the disruptive elements in the various ships. That these elements did not achieve immediate success and influence the temper of the men against the officers must always remain a tribute to the underlying loyalty of the vast majority of the men to their officers.

Loyalty to the officers persisted, but loyalty to the Admiralty and the administrative heads of the Royal Navy evaporated almost completely. The men, knowing of the Admiralty's original stand against the universal application of the 1925 rates of pay, considered that they had been betrayed by the Admiralty. The fact that they had not been previously warned of this impending reduction seemed to them explicable in only one way—that the Admiralty had instituted the pay cuts behind the backs of the men and had tried to rush them through before protest through the usual official channels could become effective. There was, in fact, among the men

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in the ships at Invergordon, a widespread feeling that the Admiralty, in the full knowledge of the fact that they had betrayed the trust imposed in them by the men of the Fleet, had endeavoured to escape the consequences until the orders for the reductions in pay were approved and passed through to the Fleet.

This feeling, which was by no means without foundation in the light of the facts then known to the men of the Fleet, was used to great effect by those men who had from the first maintained that "collective strike action" would be the only effective method of protesting against reductions in pay which would prove ruinous to a large number of naval ratings. It was, moreover, borne out by one most damning fact in the announcement in the Sunday newspapers. In them, the announcement of the forthcoming reductions in the pay of the Royal Navy was coupled with the news that "The Army Council issued explanations yesterday. . . ." If the Army Council had taken the trouble to issue explanations, why not the Admiralty? The men knew nothing of the Admiralty explanation which had failed to reach them owing to a breakdown in the Admiralty organisation. In their view, injured and inflamed as they were, the fact that they had received no explanation from the Admiralty while the Army Council had issued an explanation to the troops was further proof that the Admiralty, knowing that they had dealt disreputably with the men of

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the Fleet, were seeking to avoid their responsibilities.

Here it may be interpolated that neither in the Army nor the Royal Air Force did the reductions in pay have such great effect as in the Royal Navy. This was because both the other Services were manned by short service entries to a greater extent than the Royal Navy. This was even more true of the Royal Air Force than of the Army, where, in spite of the explanations issued by the Army Council and received at the proper time by the troops, trouble was experienced in some commands over the reductions in pay. In the Royal Air Force the vast majority of the personnel were short service men who had been recruited since October 1925 and were therefore unaffected by the proposed reductions in pay.

There was consternation and indignation in the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon. Not only did the men feel that they had been betrayed, but many of them literally found themselves facing bankruptcy because of these cuts, for they were in the process of buying houses, furniture, and other goods on the hire-purchase instalment system. They saw their household goods being seized and their homes broken up. Nor was consternation confined to the men of the lower deck. Married petty officers and officers also found themselves facing reductions which could not be contemplated with equanimity.

Still there was no official confirmation of the

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proposed reductions in pay as reported on the wireless and in the Press. At this juncture so great was the concern felt by some officers at the effect of the imposition of the reductions in pay without any explanation that they acted upon their own initiative and sought to explain to their men the financial crisis and the need for national economy. Among others, the Commanding Officer of the cruiser *Norfolk*—a ship which played a most important part in the mutiny—addressed his men after divine service on Sunday morning on the subject of the national crisis and the need for economy.

This was a wise measure, for it was obvious that for the men to be left completely in the dark any longer would increase the danger of the situation. Yet it did not have entirely a good effect. While some appreciation of the financial difficulties of the country served to steady many of the older men, the more volatile and indignant elements were quick to seize upon the fact that hard facts regarding the reductions in pay were avoided. This could not be otherwise, for there was still no official news, and no Commanding Officer could explain the reports in the newspapers.

There was another and more dangerous repercussion of this attempt on the part of officers left “in the air” to explain matters to their men. Agitators, to whom the events of the last twenty-four hours had given greatly increased influence,

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spread it about that the explanations thus offered by the officers proved that the officers were in league with the Admiralty and were purposely keeping their men in ignorance of the full details of the cuts in pay. As proof of this the statements in the newspapers were pointed out as showing that the officers were to receive negligible reductions in comparison with those to be imposed upon the more junior able seamen. Mercifully, this attempt to cause friction between the men and their officers had practically no result, and throughout the mutiny loyalty to officers, except in one or two cases, proved one of the most important characteristics of the mutiny.

After addressing his ship's company, the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Norfolk* went on board H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, flag-ship of the Second Cruiser Squadron, to which the *Norfolk* belonged, and conferred with Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, commanding that squadron. But there was still no official news. Even in that flag-ship the Admiralty Fleet Orders announcing the reductions in pay had not been received.

At about noon on Sunday, September 13th, these Admiralty Fleet Orders containing the announcement of the cuts in pay were distributed to some of the battleships. They were received soon after noon on board H.M.S. *Valiant*, but still their true significance was not immediately appreciated. As a result very few men were aware of the arrival of

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the Fleet Orders giving the details of the reductions in pay at the time they fell in as liberty-men to go ashore. Being Sunday, the majority of the liberty-men left their ships soon after 1 p.m.

Ashore, the men met their friends and contemporaries from the other ships. There was much discussion of the announcement in the Sunday newspapers. Men worked out for the hundredth time how their private family budgets would be affected. They compared notes and found that the vast majority would be crippled, if not actually ruined, by the cuts. Indignation grew. Among the men moved the agitators, feeding the indignation and seeking to collate it into a mass feeling which could be powerfully used. There had arrived at the little greystone hotel in the main street of Invergordon a number of civilians. Some of these were paid political agitators, anxious to make the most of the situation which had arisen.

To Invergordon there also came representatives of the *Daily Worker*, organ of the British Communist Party. Invergordon was to be the scene of a great campaign on the part of the *Daily Worker* and the Communist Party. The financial crisis and the failure of the Admiralty organisation was creating an opportunity for long preparations to be brought to fruition.

With the exception of a few of the avowed agitators in the Fleet, the men would not give any civilian agitator a hearing. The Royal Navy

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is an exclusive Service, and the great majority of the men regarded the crisis arising out of the announcements of the pay cuts as a purely domestic crisis into which they resented the intrusion of outsiders.

The close co-operation between the agitators on the lower deck of the ships at Invergordon and the civilian agitators is shown by the words of Len Wincott, then an able seaman serving in H.M.S. *Norfolk* and one of the ringleaders of the mutiny. In a pamphlet entitled *The Spirit of Invergordon*, published by himself after his dismissal from the Royal Navy, Wincott writes: "The fight for justice for the twenty-four dismissed naval ratings must be linked up with the fight for the release of Allison, Shepherd, Patterson, and Priestley, who were imprisoned arising out of events connected with Invergordon."

Of these, Allison, who had been known as "Donald Campbell" when in India working for the Minority Movement, had been very active both in Russia and throughout Great Britain. He was arrested at Portsmouth on October 2nd, 1931, and charged with inciting sailors to mutiny. At Winchester Assizes in the following month he was found guilty of offences against the Incitement to Mutiny Act and sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

Shepherd had been expelled from the Labour Party after joining the Communist Party, for which party he stood as a candidate both in the London

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County Council elections and in the Parliamentary Elections of 1931 and 1934. At the time of the Invergordon mutiny he was a prominent member of the editorial staff of the Communist *Daily Worker*, a newspaper which he served for many years, both in Great Britain and as Moscow correspondent.

During the evening of this fateful Sunday, H.M.S. *Nelson*, the flag-ship of the Atlantic Fleet in normal times, arrived in the Firth and moored to seaward of the rest of the Fleet. The position she took up was at the eastern or seaward end of the battleship line, and she was thus a considerable distance below Invergordon town and pier. On board H.M.S. *Nelson* was Rear-Admiral Colvin, Chief-of-the-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet. The Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, remained in hospital at Haslar.

Also on board H.M.S. *Nelson* were the copies of the Admiralty letter explaining the cuts in pay—the official explanation which should have been given to the men two days before. Even on the arrival of H.M.S. *Nelson*, the copies of this letter were not immediately sent to H.M.S. *Hood*, flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, who was in command of the Fleet. The copies of the letter were distributed in the ordinary way by the duty steam-boat on the following (Monday) morning.

The explanation for this further delay in the delivery of these vitally important copies of the

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Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in naval pay lies in the fact that officers in H.M.S. *Nelson* and in H.M.S. *Hood* never dreamt of suspecting a breakdown in the Admiralty organisation. In H.M.S. *Nelson* the thought that the Admiralty might have failed to duplicate the issue of copies of the letter to H.M.S. *Hood*, the acting flag-ship of the Atlantic Fleet and therefore the proper authority for distribution, was never entertained. Moreover, the letter was already obsolete when H.M.S. *Nelson* arrived at Invergordon, and there was, therefore, no reason whatever for imagining its immediate and special delivery to be important or desirable.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson in H.M.S. *Hood* had no reason to believe that there should be on board H.M.S. *Nelson* a vitally important document which he should have received direct from the Admiralty several days before. Had there been any reason to suspect such a thing, H.M.S. *Hood* would have signalled to H.M.S. *Nelson* ordering its immediate delivery. But, since no official explanation of the reduction in pay had been received from the Admiralty, the only possible conclusion was that the Admiralty, for some reason known best in Whitehall, had decided not to issue any explanation.

Meanwhile events of the greatest importance were taking place ashore. The great mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet was being planned and a "sailors' soviet" being set up.

A large number of the men of the watch ashore

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from the ships lying off Invergordon gathered as usual in the canteen. Indignation at the announcements contained in the Sunday newspapers about the reductions in naval pay had risen further during the afternoon, and had been increased by the fact that some men asserted that Admiralty Fleet Orders officially announcing the imposition of these cuts had been received on board their ships. The men did not gather in the canteen as men attending a mass meeting. They gathered there to drink beer and talk things over before going off to their ships. They were, in fact, acting according to normal custom. But no sooner had a large number of men gathered in the canteen than mass psychology, skilfully exploited by agitators among the men, began to have its effect.

The gathering in the canteen developed into a mass meeting of more than 600 sailors. At this meeting the question of the reductions in pay was fully discussed, and the effect the cuts would have upon the men and their wives and families was pointed out in no uncertain terms.

Speakers were at pains to drive home to the men that, if the reductions became operative, as they were to do in a fortnight's time on October 1st, their homes and their furniture would be seized, the insurance policies representing their savings would lapse, their children would starve, and their wives might be driven to prostitution and other vices in order to live. The fact that protest and pleas

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of undue hardship forwarded through the usual Service channels would probably prove useless was also brought home to the men. A constitutional protest to the divisional officers, to be forwarded and considered in turn by the executive officers, the captains, the flag officers in command of squadrons, and the Commander-in-Chief (who was ill in hospital) would not reach the Admiralty before the cuts were in force, and appeals for the rescinding of reductions actually in force would have less than no chance of success.

It was left to Able Seaman Bond, of H.M.S. *Rodney*, to point out to the men that the only effective method of resistance to the cuts lay in mutiny. Standing upon a table in the canteen, he made a fiery speech in which he called upon the men to resist the cuts by the only method likely to prove effective—the employment of “collective strike action.” He was careful, as were all the other men, to avoid the word “mutiny,” and there is no doubt that many of the men concerned in the Invergordon mutiny did not realise that their actions amounted to mutiny until this was pointed out to them by the officers. By that time, however, they had acted, and were already guilty of mutiny, so that the knowledge had little or no deterrent effect.

The speech of Able Seaman Bond received sympathetic hearing from men packed in the canteen. The men were worked-up and ripe for collective

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action. Able Seaman Bond was followed on the table by Able Seaman Wincott of H.M.S. *Norfolk*. Able Seaman Wincott elaborated the appeal of Able Seaman Bond for "collective strike action." He went further—to lengths which would certainly not have been tolerated by the great majority of the men in the Fleet had they not been inflamed by a sense of very real injustice.

Able Seaman Wincott set about convincing the men that there was in the Royal Navy, and particularly among the officers of the Royal Navy, a wastage of public money which amounted to far more than the total amount which would be saved to the Treasury by the imposition of the crippling pay cuts upon the men on the lower deck. He elaborated the theme that millions of pounds were "wasted" yearly on the carrying out of "unnecessary exercises," and showed a fine indifference to the pursuit of efficiency, by constant exercises, which has always been one of the greatest traditions of the British Navy. He went on to deliver a tirade against the expenditure of money upon officers' extras (which are always paid for out of the pockets of the officers themselves), the upkeep of admirals' yachts, the entertainment of foreign notabilities, the "unlimited" number of servants for captains and admirals, and many other matters. In many of his contentions Wincott proved himself to be ignorant of the strict "King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions," but in nearly all of them he gave

proof of the fact that he had been carefully coached in the theses of the Communist Party.

It must be conceded, however, that some matters which were raised by Able Seaman Wincott in his speech, and which were used by him to prove that the reductions in the pay of the lower deck were unnecessary, were questions upon which there had recently been a definite abuse of the regulations by a small minority of officers. These were the use of Government stores by officers ashore and for purposes having no relation to the reasons for which the stores had been drawn, and the frequency with which the motor-cars of officers were repaired by artisan ratings of the ship to which officers belonged and with the use of Government tools and stores. Both these abuses had been the subject of courts martial during preceding months, and steps were already being taken to stamp them out.

Able Seaman Wincott, however, was not concerned with the ethics of these abuses. He appealed to the men in the canteen not to allow their pay, and the lives and happiness of their wives and children, to stand the brunt of these unauthorised incursions into the public purse.

It was a clever move on his part. It appealed alike to all those men who had small and personal grievances against individual officers or against the conditions under which they were serving, and, more important still, it increased the sense of injury of his hearers and inflamed both their sense of

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injustice of the pay cuts and their determination to resist them to the utmost.

Able Seaman Wincott, who was undoubtedly a very able man when it came to playing upon the feelings of a large number of men, seized his opportunity. He acted as if the principle of adopting "collective strike action" had already been agreed by all the men present in the canteen, and called for volunteers to act as representatives of each ship upon a "sailors' soviet" He wanted one representative from each ship, but so inflamed were the men by this time that it was difficult to thin out the large numbers of volunteers to a single representative from each ship. The representatives were, however, finally selected, and these were instructed to discover the extent of the general feeling throughout the ships' companies in their various ships. They were to report back on this subject to a meeting at the canteen on the following evening, when a final decision as to the action to be taken to resist the pay reductions was to be taken.

Looking back upon the events in the canteen on the night of Sunday, September 13th, one is struck by the fact that plans for immediate mutiny by "collective strike action" were not at once adopted. The feeling of the men was running high, yet even in the heat of the moment discretion prevailed. It was realised that half the personnel of the Fleet was on board the ships, and that no effective action could be taken unless and until the support of that

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other half of the personnel had been secured.

Normally, in harbour, the personnel of a ship is divided into two watches, port and starboard, for leave. Each watch is granted shore leave on alternate days. It was for this reason that the mutiny at Invergordon took two days to mature after the first shock had been received in the shape of the announcement of the pay cuts in the Sunday newspapers.

The mass meeting in the canteen had been attended by considerable noise. There was shouting and cheering which was heard by the officer in charge of the patrol landed by the ship having the "guard" to keep order ashore.

The fact that there was a noisy meeting of sailors in the canteen was reported to H.M.S. *Hood*, flagship of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, who was temporarily in command of the Fleet. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson immediately sent his Chief-of-the-Staff, Captain J. F. C. Patterson, ashore to investigate. By the time the Rear-Admiral's Chief-of-the-Staff had landed, however, the meeting in the canteen had concluded its business and broken up. Only a few of the more rowdy elements were indulging in cat-calls, cheers, and the singing of ribald ditties. Thus it was that the Chief-of-the-Staff to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson returned to H.M.S. *Hood* and reported that the rowdyism was due only to a small minority of the sailors who appeared to have had too much to drink, and that it was in no way serious.

The Chief-of-the-Staff to Rear-Admiral Tomkin-

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son was back on board H.M.S. *Hood* before the men began to congregate at the pier in order to embark in the boats to take them back to their ships. Had he been on the pier when the liberty-men were embarking in the boats he might well have formed a different opinion. There was much cheering and shouting of slogans. Among the latter, two were prominent. They were, "We won't let the *Rodney* down," and "We're not yellow-bellies."

The true significance of the latter slogan has never been explained. There are two alternative meanings, each of which is believed by a great many officers and men to be the right one. One is that "yellow-bellies" meant cowards, and that the phrase has been coined from American argot. The other, and most likely, meaning, was that by "yellow-bellies" the men were referring to Chinese, whom they regarded as a subject race content to work twenty-four hours a day for a handful of rice and the pickings of the "gash," or garbage.

The cheering and shouting of slogans at the pier and in the boats as the liberty-men left the pier echoed across the still water of the Firth. To those who happened to be on the upper decks of the ships it was immediately obvious that something out of the ordinary was occurring. But most of the officers were below decks at that time, and by the time the boats approached the ships their cargoes of liberty-men were again as silent and orderly as they had been on the previous night.

No action was therefore taken. Actually it is impossible, in the light of after events, to visualise the taking of any action at this juncture which would not have precipitated a far worse crisis. It must be remembered that the officers themselves were feeling injured and not a little bewildered by the announcements of pay cuts which they had read in the Sunday newspapers. They had received no guidance whatever from the Admiralty. Not only were they bewildered by the form of the announcement of the pay reductions without any official explanation, but they appeared to be quite unable to appreciate that the situation at Invergordon had deteriorated so rapidly that the men of the Fleet were on the verge of open mutiny.

In the absence of official news or orders, there seemed to the officers to be only one policy to adopt—the policy of “wait and see.” This attitude was strengthened by the conviction that the taking of action in the absence of official news or orders would not be justified, might precipitate a crisis, and would be unlikely to receive the support of the denizens of Whitehall. This accounts for the fact that no action was taken by the ships’ officers when officers of the watch and the midshipmen in charge of boats reported the rowdiness and shouting of slogans on the pier. Nevertheless, the reports of the midshipmen in charge of boats were not ridiculed as alarmist as they had been on the previous night. They were received and anxiously considered.

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In the case of H.M.S. *Malaya*, which, like H.M.S. *Warspite*, was under sailing orders, the news of the noise ashore was received on board while the officers were at a cinema show on the half-deck after dinner. An officer was immediately sent ashore to make certain that no members of the ship's company of H.M.S. *Malaya* were concerned in the noise. This is interesting, since it shows that the spirit of inter-ship rivalry and the philosophy of "keeping one's own yard arm clear" had begun to be concerned rather with the good of the individual ship than with the good of the Service as a whole. It also demonstrates that the noise ashore was still generally interpreted as an ordinary liberty-men's row.

It would, however, be wrong to give the impression that no action whatever was taken by the officers during this anxious time. In practically every ship during Sunday afternoon and evening individual officers were doing their best to explain matters to the men of their divisions and to calm their fears. Moreover, very definite precautions were planned in case there should be a recurrence of noise at the canteen on the following evening. The advisability of not granting shore leave on the following day was first given earnest consideration, but wisely abandoned on the ground that it would only pile grievance upon grievance and would almost certainly lead to a collapse of the sympathy existing between the men and their officers.

XI

THE PAY CUTS AND THE ADMIRALTY LETTER

EARLY on the morning of Monday, September 14th, H.M.S. *Warspite*, flag-ship of Rear-Admiral French, Rear-Admiral of the Second Battle Squadron, and H.M.S. *Malaya*, proceeded to sea. They were to carry out practices designed as a prelude to the forthcoming two-ship concentration gunnery firings. On completion of the day's exercises, H.M.S. *Malaya* anchored off Nairn for the night. This is of importance, since it precluded representatives from the ship's company of H.M.S. *Malaya* taking part in the final organisation of the mutiny and accounted in no small degree for the fact that only small signs of mutiny appeared in this ship.

The remainder of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon remained in harbour and carried out "general drill" independently. "General drill" in the Royal Navy consists of carrying out all manner of evolutions, from getting out boats and anchors to preparing for action or to be taken in tow. The evolutions are always carried out against time, and more often than not the drills are carried out simultaneously by all the ships of a fleet in a competitive manner. At Invergordon on the morning of Monday, September 14th, the drills were

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carried out "independently"—that is, each ship was working against the clock and not against her consorts, and the drills to be carried out were the choice of the Commanding Officer of each ship and not the signalled choice of the Admiral of each squadron.

In some ships the drills on Monday morning were carried out in a somewhat lackadaisical manner. Certainly the time taken for most of the various evolutions compared very unfavourably with the established records. The officers in most ships, however, realising that the morale of the men was far from normal, refrained from "chasing" the men except in cases of slackness which could not be overlooked without impairing discipline. There was little of this, the slowness of many of the drills reflecting the fact that the men were preoccupied and were not giving their whole minds to their tasks, rather than downright slackness.

During the forenoon of this day, while the ships in harbour were carrying out "general drill," the duty steam-boat delivered the official mails to H.M.S. *Hood* from H.M.S. *Nelson*. Among these was the Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in naval pay. This was the letter dated and sent out from the Admiralty on Thursday, September 10th, and intended by the Admiralty to be promulgated to all men in the Atlantic Fleet on Friday, September 11th—three days before it was received on board the flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson at Invergordon.

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Another important event occurred on this Monday morning. This was the completion of the normal distribution of the weekly Admiralty Fleet Orders—orders which, to the surprise and consternation of officers and men alike, detailed without any explanation the reductions in naval pay to be imposed on October 1st.

Before the Admiralty letter was promulgated even in the flag-ship, H.M.S. *Hood*, the newspapers had been received on board. All the newspapers gave details of the reductions in naval pay which were to be imposed on October 1st. There was also immediate evidence of the campaign of the Communist *Daily Worker*. There were more copies of this sheet on sale at Invergordon on Monday, September 14th, 1931, than ever before or since. The *Daily Worker*, moreover, carried on its front page a tabulated statement of the naval pay cuts imposed by the Fleet Orders issued by the Admiralty. According to the *Daily Worker*, the pay of the able seaman was to be cut by 25 per cent, that of the petty officer by 12 per cent, and that of the officers by only 9 per cent.

We now know that this computation of the reductions in naval pay was completely fallacious. It must be remembered, however, that these figures did not contradict to any appreciable extent the percentages arrived at by the men of the Fleet from the statements in the Sunday newspapers—which statements purported to have been culled from the

official "Admiralty Fleet Orders issued last night."

The statements of the *Daily Worker*, therefore, had a profound effect upon the men on the lower deck of the ships at Invergordon. These men had themselves tried to compute the pay reductions from the scanty news in the Sunday newspapers. Here, in the *Daily Worker*, were computations which came very near to coinciding with the calculations of the men themselves. Still there was no official news whereby the prevalent idea that the able seamen were to be victimised to a greater extent than the officers or more senior ratings could be contradicted.

The summary of the cuts given in the *Daily Worker*, therefore, led to a distinct hardening of opinion against the pay reductions among the men of the Fleet even before the official Admiralty letter of explanation was at last promulgated from H.M.S. *Hood*.

When this Admiralty letter explaining the forthcoming reductions in pay was at last made known to the men, it was, for the most part, greeted with derision and characterised as "soft soap." This was due partly to the manner in which the letter dealt with the pay cuts, and partly to the fact that it had arrived too late to receive the sympathetic consideration of the men.

The Admiralty letter announcing and explaining the forthcoming cuts in naval pay has been bitterly criticised by both officers and men of the Royal Navy. The chief criticisms concerned the form and

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wording of the letter, which led to it being regarded as an indifferent attempt to justify an action which the men were convinced to be quite unjustifiable. The letter contained matter which demonstrated that it had been drafted by persons out of touch with the problems and viewpoint of the men serving in the Fleet, and avoided what to them was the main issue—the annulment of the stand taken on behalf of the naval personnel by Lord Beatty. In short, the Admiralty letter showed that the Admiralty had little appreciation of the tenets and psychology of the men of the Royal Navy on this all-important question of pay.

In the first place, the Admiralty letter; like the subsequent Admiralty order, issued after the mutiny had broken out, ordering the ships to return to their home ports for investigations to be carried out by the local Commander-in-Chief; placed the whole onus of the reductions upon the Government. Although this was technically a correct statement of fact, it did nothing to renew the confidence of the men of the Fleet in the Admiralty. The men well knew that a previous Government had been defeated by a First Sea Lord of the Admiralty upon this very same point of reductions in naval pay. It was not without reason, therefore, that they continued to consider the Admiralty responsible, in spite of the Admiralty letter.

The Admiralty letter went on to explain the reductions to be effected in the pay of officers.

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This part of the letter may have been intended to explain to the officers the reductions which they were about to suffer in their pay. Such an explanation might have been accepted had the letter not gone on to admit that, in the absence of full official explanation, the opinion might be formed that the men were to suffer greater reductions than the officers.

It was a great mistake on the part of the Admiralty to enter into any argument or to seek to explain that the officers were to suffer at least as much as the men. Among both the officers and the majority of the men of the Fleet any such comparisons between officers and men were considered irrelevant and invidious. This was the comparison which the agitators and the *Daily Worker* had made. It opened up a controversy abhorred by the vast majority of the naval personnel. For the Admiralty to enter into this controversy upon the ground of the *Daily Worker* and the agitators could not but lead to a further lowering of the prestige of the Admiralty throughout the Navy.

The question of the relative sacrifices to be demanded from officers and men, moreover, hinged, not upon the reductions in actual pay received, but upon allowances payable to the men and not payable to the officers. These allowances were, for the most part, unaffected by the proposed reductions. This, however, was not clearly explained or set out in detail, and the men of the Atlantic Fleet

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were in no mood to accept generalisations. The Sunday newspapers, quoting "Fleet Orders issued by the Admiralty," had stated that the allowance paid to men in lieu of grog was to be reduced from 21s. for three months to 15s. for three months. If one allowance was to be reduced, there seemed to the men to be no acceptable guarantee that other allowances would not be reduced.

The letter made it quite clear that the reductions in naval pay were based upon the recommendations of the May Economy Committee, and that these recommendations had suffered no modifications at the instance of the Admiralty. It even went so far as to quote from the report of the May Economy Committee, which stated that this committee did not regard the proposed reductions as sacrifices necessitated by the financial crisis, but as permanent readjustments. This quotation accorded extremely badly with an appeal for loyal and cheerful sacrifice in a time of national emergency.

The report of the Anderson Committee on the pay of all Government servants and of the fighting Services was also quoted by the Admiralty. This was the committee which had reported in 1923, and which had, in 1925, led to the introduction of the reduced scales of naval pay for new entries. It had been the recommendations of this committee which, as the men of the Fleet knew, Lord Beatty had opposed so strongly and successfully, so far as men already serving were concerned.

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If there were two bodies which had inspired the hatred of the men of the lower deck of the Royal Navy, they were these two committees. Not only did they threaten the conditions of life and of pay of the naval personnel, but the sailors were bitterly aware of the fact that there had served upon neither of them anybody with knowledge of the special problems and circumstances of the men of the Royal Navy.

It is difficult to believe that any Board of Admiralty, even in a moment of crisis, could have been so ignorant of, or indifferent to, the feeling among the men of the Navy as to quote the reports of these two committees as explanation of forthcoming reductions in pay. Senior officers throughout the Navy realised this blunder, and it was chiefly for this reason that the Admiralty letter of explanation was not promulgated in full to the men except in a few isolated cases.

One other serious blunder was committed in the drafting of this Admiralty letter, which was issued with the object of securing the loyal co-operation in sacrifice of the men of the lower deck in the Royal Navy. In giving examples of the effect which the reductions in pay would have upon certain ratings, comparison was made, not with the scales of pay then in force, but with the scales of pay operative in the years before the Great War. In this the Admiralty appeared to have adopted the view expressed by the Jerram Committee in 1919

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that the 1914 rates of pay were adequate. This view flouted the appeal made eight years before to the Chairman of the Dockyard Committee of the House of Commons by the Chairmen of the Lower Deck Welfare Committees. This appeal had pointed out that any comparison with pre-war rates of pay should not for a moment be entertained, and had issued a warning that economy effected on such a basis would lead to "loss of efficiency through the creation of a discontented naval personnel."

Quite apart from this former warning, the quotation of comparisons made with the scales of pay operative in 1914 was obviously of no immediate interest to the men of the Fleet in 1931. Certainly the comparisons enabled the Admiralty to show an increase instead of a decrease in the pay to be drawn by individuals in the future, but what interested the men was how much *less* pay they were to get after October 1st, 1931, than before that date. To them the fact that they would, even after October 1st, be drawing considerably more pay than their predecessors in the Navy of 1914 was an irrelevant and purely academic argument.

The letter, however, for all its glaring faults, did appeal to the men for their loyal acceptance of reductions in pay. Promulgated to the men of the Fleet, in part, only a few days before the news of the pay cuts was received from other sources, it might have outweighed with the personnel of the Atlantic Fleet the appeals of the agitators and the knowledge

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that acceptance of the pay cuts spelt ruin for their homes. In such an event, strong but orthodox protest might have taken the place of mutiny.

The letter, however, came too late. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson and his officers had been kept in ignorance of any proposed reductions in pay while the morale of the men under their command was undermined, and they had been placed in a position in which they would hardly have been justified in taking any action.

It was probably as well that the senior officers at Invergordon had not tried to explain officially the announcement of the pay reductions heard on the radio and seen in the Sunday newspapers in the absence of the Admiralty letter, for they could not have guessed the attitude of the Admiralty, and the arrival of the letter would have contradicted any statements which they might have made to the men. The result would have been a collapse of the sympathy and confidence between officers and men and the risk of a far more dangerous situation.

This view is borne out by the fact that those divisional officers who had endeavoured on their own initiative to explain the pay cuts as announced in the Sunday newspapers, and the attitude of the Admiralty with regard to these cuts, found that the Admiralty letter explained them from a totally different point of view. They found, in fact, that they were made to look ignorant fools in the eyes of their men.

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No officer or man serving in the Fleet would ever have imagined that the Admiralty would seek to explain the reductions in pay in the way it was done in the Admiralty letter. Consequently, and not without reason, the Admiralty letter was bitterly criticised throughout the Royal Navy.

It was regarded more as an apology than the explanation which officers and men felt that they had a right to expect.

The actual extent of the percentage reductions involved by the imposition of the pay cuts was the subject of acrimonious argument in Parliament as well as in the Fleet. The computation of the reductions on a percentage basis was a complicated procedure, for it was obvious that non-substantive or specialist pay and various allowances unaffected by the reductions must be taken into account if a fair comparison was to be made. These allowances, which were not affected by the cuts, were not taken into account by the *Daily Worker*, which, therefore, produced an exaggerated idea of the extent to which the lower ratings in the Fleet would suffer under the reductions.

There appears to have been no official guidance to the Press in order to assist the newspapers to make and publish accurate accounts of the way in which representative ratings would be affected by the cuts in pay. Knowledge of the importance of a clear understanding on so vital a matter makes it clear that such a precaution should have been taken

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by the Admiralty, and also by the other Departments the wages of whose personnel were to be reduced.

On Monday, September 14th, *The Times* gave a list of the reductions as follows:

	s.	d.	s.	d.	
Chief Petty Officer	8	6	to 7	6	per day
Leading Seaman	5	3	to 4	4	„ „
Able Seaman	4	0	to 3	0	„ „
Ordinary Seaman	2	9	to 2	0	„ „

In the same issue *The Times* supported the contention of the men that the universal application of the 1925 rates of pay would impose unequal sacrifices and would constitute a breach of contract. "It has been affirmed on several occasions on behalf of the Government that ratings who had entered under the 1919 rates (those approved by the Jerram Committee) would continue to receive them during the whole period of their continuous service. . . . A Petty Officer who served throughout the war must now lose 1s. a day, whereas his successor of the post-war Navy is not affected by the changes. The great majority of the men with longer service are reduced by 1s. a day and in many cases their pensions are also affected."

In Parliament, when the news of the mutiny at Invergordon was received, there was much argument as to the exact extent to which the total emoluments of the men of the Royal Navy were to be cut by the application of the 1925 rates of pay to the

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men who had entered the Royal Navy before these rates had come into force.

It was left to Commander Kenworthy to give what approximated closely to a true picture of the situation. He pointed out that, counting pay alone, without allowances, the cuts amounted to

Admiral	7 per cent
Lieutenant-Commander	3·7 per cent
Chief Petty Officer	11·8 per cent
Able Seaman	25 per cent

The cuts on officers were almost unaffected, except in certain specialist branches, by allowances being taken into account, since officers were not in receipt of the greatest allowance of all—marriage allowance.

Commander Kenworthy pointed out that, taking allowances into consideration, the cuts would affect certain representative ratings as follows :

Petty Officer, married and with two children	7·7 per cent
Able Seaman, married and with two children	10·5 per cent
Able Seaman, unmarried	13·6 per cent

This was close to the mark, and it contained to some extent the human element which the official examples given in the Admiralty letter of explanation so conspicuously lacked.

The men of the Fleet were concerned, not with

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figures and percentages, but with human problems of a type with which the Admiralty had shown itself to be sadly out of touch. Moreover, by no stretch of the imagination could the proposed cuts be said to be fairly applied to all classes of ratings in the Royal Navy. As an illustration, a chief engine-room artificer drawing £4 7s. 6d. a week was to be reduced by 1s. a day, and an able seaman who only received 28s. a week was also to be reduced by 1s. a day. That could hardly be called equality of sacrifice. Many of the men who were reduced from 4s. a day to 3s. a day were married and had families, and were paying for their houses and furniture by hire-purchase. To them the proposed reduction represented a cut of 25 per cent—and ruin.

The effects of the proposed reductions in pay upon the men in the Royal Navy may be summed up as follows:

1. The men of the Fleet, being aware that some form of economy at the expense of the pay of the naval personnel was likely, had come to the conclusion, after discussing the matter with their wives and families, that the maximum reduction which could possibly be supported by an able seaman was 6d. a day. The news that a cut of double this maximum was about to be enforced came as a staggering blow to the men.

2. In the light of previous discussion with their families, a great many of the married men knew at

once that the imposition of the proposed reductions would mean that they would be unable to keep up their homes. The blow was nearly as heavy for many of the unmarried men who had been saving up, in some cases for years, in order to be able to marry and make a home. These men saw their dreams, in many cases near to realisation, snatched away by the severity of the proposed reductions.

3. A great many of the men who were to be hardest hit by the proposed reductions—the able seamen and stokers—were under heavy obligations with regard to hire-purchase agreements for houses or furniture. These men realised that the proposed pay cuts would make it impossible for them to adhere to their part of the agreements and pay the full instalments. Under the circumstances, they feared that the firms holding the agreements might seize the goods, and so not only break up their homes, but lead to a disappearance of savings which were represented by instalments already paid. Many of the unmarried men among the junior ratings, moreover, were in the habit of remitting part of their pay regularly to tailors, motor-cycle firms, and other tradesmen. These men saw themselves forced, through no fault of their own, to break their word under the imposition of the new scales of pay. There was also a very real fear among many of them that they might even be arraigned for debt.

4. During the years before the events at Invergordon, insurance had been much to the fore, and

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agents of numerous insurance companies had done a great deal of business among the men of the lower deck of the Royal Navy. Particularly was this true of the married men and the men who were planning to get married. To many of these men the insurance premiums which they had paid represented a large proportion of their total savings. To the other hardships which would be imposed upon these men by the enforcement of the new rates of pay was added the fear that under the new pay scales they would find themselves unable to continue the payment of insurance premiums for which they had contracted.

5. The system of manning the ships of the Royal Navy from one of the three "home ports" seeks to ensure that a man will serve in a ship using the port to the port division of which he belongs. Thus most men in the Navy, when they marry, settle down in or near the particular "home port" containing the manning depot to which they belong. But this is not true of all men. In small ships, notably in submarines, vessels are seldom manned completely from one depot as are the larger ships in normal times. Thus men may be serving in a ship based on Devonport when they have established a home at Chatham, and therefore have to travel long distances when proceeding on, or returning from, leave.

Unmarried men, moreover, usually go to the homes of their parents when granted long leave. These homes may be anywhere in the British Isles.

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The Royal Navy draws recruits from every county in England, as well as from Scotland and Ireland, but there is no "home port" north of Chatham on the east and Devonport on the west. A large proportion of unmarried men, therefore, have to undertake long journeys when they go home on leave. Certain travelling concessions are made to members of His Majesty's forces travelling in uniform, but long journeys are expensive in spite of these. The imposition of the reduced rates of pay would have made it impossible for some men to save enough money to enable them to travel to and from their homes when granted long leave.

It will be seen that every one of these effects, which the imposition of the reduced rates of pay would have had upon the men of the Royal Navy, was concerned with an intensely human problem.

To illustrate the difficulties with which the men of the Fleet had to contend when considering the proposed reductions in pay, two typical cases, which came to light after the mutiny, may be quoted.

The first case was that of an able seaman with more than three years' service in that rating. He was married and had one child. A second child was expected. He was under twenty-five years of age, and therefore not entitled to marriage allowance, but had one good conduct badge. He had been drawing 31s. 6d. a week. If the proposed cuts were enforced, he would draw 25s. 1d. a week. His rent was 8s. a week, so he would have 17s. 1d. a week to provide

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for a wife and two children as well as his expenses when away from home.

Another case was that of a stoker, married and with one child. He was also the sole support of his wife's parents. His mother-in-law was dying of cancer and his father-in-law was a cripple. The stoker was over twenty-five years of age and drawing marriage allowance at the rate of 12s. a week. He had two good conduct badges, making his total emoluments 38s. 6d. a week, of which he was in the habit of sending the greater portion home each week. Under the proposed cuts his pay would be reduced from 38s. 6d. to 32s. 8d. a week. The expenses of his home included 16s. 9d. weekly for rent and 3s. 8d. weekly for insurance, and there were four months' doctor's bills overdue when the pay cuts were announced.

These two examples, which are of cases by no means exceptional of the situation of the men in the Fleet, were in sharp contrast to the lack of understanding and sympathy shown in the Admiralty letter explaining the pay cuts.

That the Admiralty letter of explanation about the forthcoming pay cuts was open to severe criticism, and that certain portions of it might have done considerable harm if they had been generally promulgated to the men appears to have been clear to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson as soon as he read the letter, for he did not give orders for the whole of the Admiralty letter to be read to the men or posted on

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the notice-boards in the ships. He signalled to all ships at Invergordon that certain passages from the Admiralty letter were to be made known to the men without delay.

Signals travel faster than boats, particularly when the boats have to go from ship to ship throughout a large fleet to distribute documents. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson's signal of urgent instructions, therefore, reached certain ships a considerable time before the letter. In these ships there was a moment of puzzlement, since the document to which the signal referred could not be traced. In some cases commanding officers went to other ships to borrow a copy of the letter and returned on board their own ships before the copy consigned to them by means of the ordinary Fleet distribution arrived.

By noon on Monday, September 14th, however, all the men in all the ships at Invergordon had been acquainted of the fact that the 1925 rates of pay were to be applied throughout the Royal Navy on October 1st, and received the official explanation that the reductions were to be imposed by the Government owing to the immediate necessity for economy in the national expenditure.

This tardy announcement and official explanation did more harm than good. The men were in no mood to give sympathetic hearing to a document which only served to confirm their worst fears, and certainly did not appear to them to justify a step which they regarded as a breach of contract.

XII

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ON the afternoon of Monday, September 14th, shore leave was given as usual to one half of the crews of the ships at Invergordon. Leave to go ashore on this day was, of course, to those men who had been of the "watch on board" on Sunday ; while those men who had been ashore on the previous day were now in the watch on board. One would have thought that this would have prevented the completion ashore of plans for collective action begun at the canteen on the previous evening. At the meeting in the canteen on the Sunday evening, representatives from each ship had been selected and instructed to gauge and co-ordinate the feeling in their ships against the cuts in pay, and to report back at a meeting to be held in the canteen on this Monday evening. In the normal course of events, these representatives, having been ashore on the Sunday, would have been on board on Monday, and so prevented from reporting to the meeting planned for Sunday evening.

There is, however, in the Royal Navy, a long standing privilege which entitles men to put forward requests to be allowed to go ashore even if they are in the watch on board, provided that they

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can produce a substitute of similar rating from the "watch ashore" to stay on board in their place. Provided the men concerned are of good character and not in the habit of "breaking their leave"—that is, failing to return punctually from shore leave—such requests are invariably granted.

This privilege was abused on the afternoon of Monday, September 14th, to ensure that all those men who had been ashore on the previous evening, and had been placed in executive positions in the "sailors' soviet" by the meeting at the canteen on Sunday, were able to attend the meeting ashore on the Monday evening. Accordingly there were, on the Monday, a number of requests put forward for "a turn of leave out of watch with substitute." These requests were nearly all granted. There was no alternative for the officers to whom the requests were preferred. Even had the officers entertained suspicions as to the probable activities of some of these men once they set foot ashore, they would not have been justified in withdrawing a traditional privilege without orders to do so from the senior officer present. To withdraw such a privilege without giving the men good reason would have added to the discontent which was already apparent, and to do so in any particular ship without orders that such action was to be universal throughout the Fleet would almost certainly have precipitated a crisis in the ship in which such action was taken.

It must be borne in mind that, during those hours

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of acute anxiety which preceded the outbreak of open mutiny, the officers in each ship were concentrating upon hopes of maintaining the morale, not of the Fleet as a whole, but of their own particular ships. This was a narrow view which, however regrettable, was almost inevitable in view of the system which decreed that the preservation of a career depended upon the avoidance of trouble for the individual rather than for the Service as a whole.

By obtaining leave out of the turn of their watch, those men who had been selected as ship's representatives by the meeting at the canteen on Sunday evening were enabled to go ashore again on the Monday. Many other men—agitators and those more volatile spirits who were already wedded to the idea of "collective strike action" in protest against the reductions in pay—also abused a privilege which enabled them to take part in the framing of the final plans for the mutiny.

There was one important difference between the men who went ashore on Monday afternoon and those who had been ashore on Sunday. On Monday there were no members of the crew of H.M.S. *Malaya* ashore, for this ship had been at sea carrying out exercises, and had anchored off Nairn for the night. On Monday, however, there was ashore half the ship's company of H.M.S. *Nelson*, which had arrived on the previous evening from Portsmouth.

This was a matter full of significance in the light

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of after events. The men of H.M.S. *Malaya* did not take part in the mutiny, although they, like the crews of the other ships at Invergordon, had first heard the news of the reduction in pay from the radio and from the newspapers. The crew of H.M.S. *Nelson*, on the other hand, had been told of the forthcoming pay cuts on Friday, September 11th—the day on which their ship had left Portsmouth—and the terms of the Admiralty letter of explanation had been made known to them on the day before any radio or Press announcements were made.

Yet the ship's company of H.M.S. *Nelson* was particularly bitter against the reductions in pay. The Admiralty explanation had served only to increase this bitterness. Thus it was that most of the 600 men from H.M.S. *Nelson* who were landed at Invergordon on the afternoon of Monday, September 14th, served greatly to stiffen the attitude of the men of the other ships at Invergordon. The crew of H.M.S. *Nelson* took at least as large a part, if not actually the largest part, in the meeting. It is, in fact, held by some officers who were present that the actual mutiny at Invergordon might have been averted had it not been for the subversive influence of the large number of men who arrived in H.M.S. *Nelson* on the evening of Sunday, September 13th.

It would be difficult to substantiate such a belief. Matters had already gone so far at Invergordon that it would have been impossible to prevent them

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taking their course without running grave risk of far more serious consequences. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the feeling of the men of *H.M.S. Nelson* did lead to a further deterioration of morale in the other ships.

Early on Monday evening a very large number of men began to muster in the canteen ashore. There was much preliminary discussion of the pay cuts in general and the Admiralty letter of explanation in particular. Then the representatives of the "sailors' soviet" from each ship gave their reports. Each one was to the effect that the vast majority of the men below the rank of leading seaman were wholeheartedly in favour of any form of collective resistance to the pay cuts, and that the leading seamen and petty officers, whilst not wishing actively to take part in any such action, were sympathetic to any movement towards securing the immediate revision of the reductions in pay.

These proceedings were nearly completed when they were interrupted by the lieutenant in charge of the patrol. This officer left his patrol outside the canteen and entered the building alone. The men were momentarily nonplussed at being interrupted by an officer, and the officer of the patrol seized the opportunity to gain a hearing from the men. He reminded the men that any combined action and speech-making was an offence under the provisions of King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, and that such offences were punishable under the

Naval Discipline Act. He stated that he fully understood that many men had grievances, but that they must be put forward in a proper manner to be forwarded to the Admiralty through the usual Service channels. Finally he said that he proposed to remain in the canteen until closing time in order to make certain that no action was taken contrary to the regulations.

The action of this officer—which was most courageous, for the hundreds of men in the canteen were considerably inflamed by the agitators and mass psychology was in command of the situation—left the men silent for a moment. It was a moment in which anything might have happened. One word might have led to violent mutiny and bloodshed. One loyal action might have led to the collapse of most of the efforts of the subversive elements.

But no loyal action was forthcoming. A sailor threw a glass of beer at the officer. The glass missed its mark, but it was an action which might well have led to far worse things had it not been for the underlying loyalty to their officers of the great majority of the men. Most of these were angry that one of their number should have so far forgotten himself as to throw a glass of beer at an officer—let alone an officer in uniform, doing his duty under most difficult circumstances.

Nevertheless, the die had been cast. There could be no going back, and shouts were raised that the

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officer of the patrol should be removed from the canteen—by force if necessary. The lieutenant stood his ground.

Determined not to allow the officer to remain in the canteen, yet reluctant to use force against an officer, the men then adopted an astonishing tactic. They formed a solid ring about the officer and slowly advanced, their arms linked and welding them into a solid mass of blue-serge-clad humanity. For a moment the lieutenant tried to resist, and his cap was knocked off in the process. But there could be no resisting that slowly advancing mass of men. Slowly but surely the lieutenant of the patrol was jostled out through the door of the canteen, and the door was shut upon him.

Outside, the officer picked up his cap, which had been thrown after him, and dusted it before putting it on again. There was nothing for it but to put into operation the carefully prepared precautionary measures which had been taken with the greatest secrecy.

These consisted of the establishment of a temporary signal station in the vicinity of the canteen. If the officer of the patrol encountered trouble in the canteen he was to send a signal to that effect from the temporary signal station. This signal would be passed direct to the pierhead, whence it would be relayed immediately to H.M.S. *Hood*, lying at the Fleet flag-ship's berth, and the closest ship to the pier. On board H.M.S. *Hood* there was an

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emergency patrol of thirty men under the command of a lieutenant-commander, ready to be landed at a moment's notice should a signal of distress be received from the officer of the ordinary patrol.

Within five minutes of the signal from the canteen being received in H.M.S. *Hood*, the emergency patrol was fallen in and was embarking in boats which had been called away "at the double" to leave their moorings at the booms and come alongside the gangways.

The emergency patrol landed at Invergordon Pier and proceeded towards the canteen. But when it reached the canteen it found it deserted. Events had been moving rapidly on shore during the time the emergency patrol was being landed. In spite of his ejection from the canteen, the warnings of the lieutenant in charge of the ordinary patrol had had some effect upon the men. There was some consultation among them, and they decided that it would be unwise to continue to make use of an Admiralty building for their mass meeting. Accordingly the canteen was emptied and the men made their way to Black Park—a recreation ground not far from the canteen.

On the way from the canteen to Black Park some of the men were accosted by a civilian. Whether this man was a journalist endeavouring to get first-hand news of the intentions of the men or a civilian concerned with some other matter has never been established. He was roughly handled by the sailors

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for having the temerity to try to interfere, and left in a semi-conscious condition. Thus the men of the Fleet, although they were planning action calculated to force a reconsideration of the pay cuts upon the political heads of the Admiralty and of the country, once again demonstrated that they considered the question as a domestic problem for the Navy, in which no outsider could be allowed to interfere.

At Black Park the mass meeting of the men from the ships lying in the Firth was continued. The principle of resistance to the pay cuts by "collective strike action" had already been agreed, but it remained to decide upon the signal which was to institute the "strike action," and to ensure its unanimous application by every ship at Invergordon. The latter was the more important because the outbreak of mutiny in the Fleet was expected to lead to the total cessation of inter-ship communication.

Two battleships—H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant*—and two battle cruisers—H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Repulse*—were due to leave harbour on Tuesday morning to carry out exercises in the Moray Firth. It was decided at the meeting at Black Park that the men of the Fleet should all refuse duty next morning. The failure of H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Rodney* to go to sea at the proper time was to be the signal for the general outbreak in all the ships of the Fleet.

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A few men in these two ships demurred, saying that in this way the responsibility for starting the strike would devolve upon the crews of these two ships and not be equally shared by the men of the whole Fleet. But these voices were soon silenced. H.M.S. *Rodney* had been described by the mutineers as "directing ship" of the Invergordon mutiny, and much of the organisation of the mutiny itself had been secretly carried forward within her great hull, in which certain men circulated freely in unauthorised places on the plea of making good small electrical defects. It was by this means that news and views were carried secretly from mess deck to mess deck and from workshop to machinery space throughout the ship. From H.M.S. *Valiant* the resistance to playing a leading part in the initiation of the mutiny was negligible.

H.M.S. *Valiant* had been commissioned at Portsmouth at the beginning of the previous December after completing a long and extensive refit in Portsmouth Dockyard. So dirty had she been when she emerged from the dockyard and commissioned for service with the Atlantic Fleet that Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth at the time, had refused to pass her as fit for service when he inspected her after commissioning. As a result, the Admiralty was forced to insist that between 600 and 700 men should be specially and immediately detailed to clean the ship before she could be considered a seagoing unit of the Fleet.

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Ever since that day H.M.S. *Valiant* had been an unhappy ship, in which agitation and disaffection had already shown itself. There had, in fact, already been in this ship one case of insubordination, amounting to minor mutiny, before the events at Invergordon in September 1931.

Among the many disaffected men in H.M.S. *Valiant* was Able Seaman Brockway. This man played a leading part in H.M.S. *Valiant* during the mutiny at Invergordon, and was subsequently dismissed from the Royal Navy. Able Seaman Brockway had held the rate of leading seaman until a few months before the Invergordon mutiny, when he had been disgraced to able seaman for a breach of discipline. Like Able Seaman Wincott in H.M.S. *Norfolk*, Able Seaman Brockway was a man of more than usual ability, and possessed a standard of education and intelligence above that of most of his messmates on the lower deck in the Royal Navy.

It was decided by the mass meeting in Black Park that the "collective strike action" was to be instituted the next morning, and that failure to proceed to sea on the part of H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* would be the sign of solidarity of the movement to all the ships lying off Invergordon.

The reason why the scheduled sailing of H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* was selected as the signal rather than that of H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Repulse*, which were also due to sail next morning,

was twofold. In the first place, H.M.S. *Repulse* was anchored in the battle cruiser anchorage some miles away from the main body of the Fleet. Apart from that, the exercise orders were to the effect that H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* were to go to sea before H.M.S. *Hood*. It would obviously have been useless to use as a signal for the spread of open mutiny to all ships an event which was to take place after two of the ships occupying most important positions in the scheme of mutiny were supposed to have left harbour.

The mass meeting then proceeded to other business—that concerned with the maintenance of solidarity in face of the probable interruption of inter-ship communication. This was a matter of supreme importance to the mutineers. Unless the men of each ship were kept constantly aware that the crews of the other ships were standing firm in mutiny, their solidarity might be impaired and they might be prevailed upon by the officers to return to duty. The collapse of the mutiny in one ship might well lead to the collapse of the mutiny throughout the Fleet, without it having attained its object of securing a remission of the proposed cuts in pay. Such an event, moreover, would in all probability lead to immediate and unpleasant disciplinary action against the mutineers.

Plans to guard against such a collapse of the “collective strike action” were urgent, for if such action were to be adopted on the following morning

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it was certain that this would be the last opportunity of concerting and perfecting an organisation by representatives of all the ships.

Within the framework of the mass meeting at Black Park there grew up a smaller meeting. This was a meeting of the chosen representatives of the men of each ship serving upon what has been variously termed the "sailors' soviet" or the "fleet executive."

At this meeting the representatives of each ship were made responsible for the solidarity of the men in their ships, and they were instructed to see that a "cheering code" was carried out. This was exactly the same organisation as that which had been adopted by the mutineers when the great mutiny of the German High Seas Fleet had first broken out thirteen years before.

At every hour at which men would normally fall in for duty the men were to cheer from ship to ship, thus assuring themselves and their fellow mutineers in the other ships that they continued in the mutiny. The same organisation was to be carried out whenever any ship saw the ship's company of another ship being addressed by an officer, or at any time when it seemed that there might be any danger of a weakening of the solidarity of the Fleet for the "strike."

This business completed, the mass meeting broke up and the men trooped back to the canteen for a final drink before returning to the pier and their

ships. Some of the more turbulent spirits sang the "Red Flag," but this did not meet with the approval of the majority. In the words of one of the mutineers after the event: "It was beer and not men who sang. We were not disloyal, but fighting for our rights."

On their arrival at the canteen the men received a surprise. The emergency patrol which had been landed from H.M.S. *Hood* was in possession of the building, and the officers of the patrol, a lieutenant-commander and two lieutenants from H.M.S. *Hood*, were behind the bar.

The officers and men of the emergency patrol made no attempt to prevent the men from congregating in the canteen. As soon as the canteen was filled to capacity by the men who had just been taking part in the mass meeting in Black Park, the lieutenant-commander stood up on the bar counter and addressed the men. He reminded them that there was a proper way in which to bring their grievances to the notice of the authorities, and pointed out that nobody realised better than the officers that the reductions in pay proposed by the Government would lead in many cases to great hardship.

It was an extremely courageous action on the part of this officer. The fact that, in spite of the inflamed spirit of the men who had just decided at a mass meeting upon mutiny, this officer was given a fair and respectful hearing is again an indication of the fact that the great majority of the men

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continued to show respect and loyalty to their officers.

When the lieutenant-commander had finished his address there were a few instants of silence. It was another moment such as that when the lieutenant of the ordinary routine patrol had addressed the men in the canteen earlier in the evening. Anything might have happened. As it was, however, the moment was seized by one of the most disaffected able seamen in the Fleet—one of the few men who wished to turn the collective action of the men against the pay cuts into a movement against the officers.

This able seaman leapt on to a table and harangued the men in an impassioned and vitriolic speech. He referred to the officers as “brass-hatted b——s” and tried to persuade the men that they were in league with the Admiralty. In an attempt to prove his words he quoted the percentage reductions given by the *Daily Worker*, which showed that the officers were to receive a far smaller reduction in pay than the men. Either by accident or design, he omitted to point out to the men that the officers were not in receipt of any marriage allowance, which made great differences in any comparisons made between the total incomes received by the officers and the men.

The officers of the emergency patrol were forced to listen to this tirade. Again it was a time at which events affecting the whole history of the British

Empire might well have occurred. But the officers, although completely at the mercy of the large crowd of men in the canteen, never lost their grip of the situation. This was due in no small part to the underlying loyalty of most of the men, who resented the remarks made by the agitator to the point of shouting ribald and contradictory remarks.

Continuing to pursue their duty in the face of difficulties which are hard to realise, the officers endeavoured to discover and note the ships to which the more disaffected elements in the canteen belonged. In this they failed. The men of the Royal Navy wear on their caps ribbons into which the name of the ship to which they belong is woven in letters of gold. This is the only means for identifying the ship to which a man belongs. In the canteen on the evening of Monday, September 14th, every man had taken the precaution of removing his cap so that there was no means of telling his ship.

Again on this momentous evening there was a dangerous moment. This was when the lights in the canteen went out. It was not an action by any man anxious to provoke a riot, as it might well have done, but the routine signal to all men in the canteen that it was time to leave and go to the pier to catch the "liberty" boats back to their ships. Nothing beyond the ordinary reception of this signal occurred, however. There were a few shouts, a few cat-calls and snatches of song, and the men left the canteen in a body.

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There was nothing more for the emergency patrol to do beyond giving to the ordinary patrol at the pier any assistance which might prove necessary. The lieutenant-commander in command of the emergency patrol left this task to the two lieutenants under his command and returned at once to H.M.S. *Hood* in order to make his report on the events of the evening.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, in command of the ships at Invergordon in the absence of the Commander-in-Chief, had invited the Commanding Officers of the ships in the Firth to dinner on this evening. The dinner-party, at which the injustice and extraordinary methods of promulgating the reductions in pay had been discussed, was ending when the lieutenant-commander of the emergency patrol arrived on board H.M.S. *Hood* and made his report in person to the Flag Captain and Chief-of-the-Staff to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson. The Chief-of-the-Staff immediately reported to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson and the dinner-party broke up, the Commanding Officers returning to their ships knowing that there had been serious trouble among the liberty-men ashore.

This, however, was not the end of the events of that evening of Monday, September 14th. When the liberty-men, numbering more than 4,000, congregated on the pier to take the boats off to their ships there was an outbreak of cheering and shouting in contrast to which the noise of the previous two

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evenings seemed a mere murmur. Slogans were shouted in unison and interspersed with snatches of song and loud cheers. It was obvious that the liberty-men as a whole were completely out of hand.

Among the slogans most freely shouted were those used the night before: "We're not yellow-bellies," and "We won't let the *Rodney* down." On this night, however, there was a new slogan, which appeared to have pride of place, since it was shouted from boat to boat until they were almost alongside their ships. This was, "Don't forget to-morrow morning."

It then became apparent to every officer in the Fleet that the men had determined upon some course of action which they proposed to adopt on the following morning. As yet, however, none of the officers knew for certain what action was contemplated, and few of them realised the full significance of the events of the past few days.

While the liberty-men were returning on board their ships an event occurred which had a profound effect on the course of the mutiny, so far as one ship was concerned, and which served to show how light were the foundations upon which the framework of the mutiny had been reared, compared with the deep-seated loyalty to officers—a loyalty which readily took the form of something amounting almost to hero-worship when occasion arose.

The liberty-men were disembarking from the boats alongside H.M.S. *York*, one of the cruisers of the Second Cruiser Squadron, when one of the

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men returning from the shore fell overboard. The tide was sluicing past the ship on the ebb, and there was no time to be lost if the life of the man was to be saved. On the quarter deck of H.M.S. *York* stood the executive officer of the ship—Commander C. Coppinger, watching with some misgiving the noisy liberty-men climbing out of the boats and up the gangway. He saw the man fall overboard, and without a moment's hesitation he dived overboard to his assistance and supported the man until a boat came down-tide to the rescue.

When the two sodden figures were brought back to the ship the rowdyism of the liberty-men changed to a cheer for their commander. There was no doubt that by his prompt action Commander Coppinger had saved the life of one of his men. The realisation of this fact led to an abrupt revulsion of feeling on the lower deck of that ship. The men felt that if they joined in the projected "collective strike action" they would be letting down an officer for whom they had an intense admiration. From that moment the morale of the ship's company of H.M.S. *York* rose, and throughout the next two days, when mutiny was raging all around them, they remained almost entirely loyal. The few isolated cases of insubordination which occurred in that ship were quickly quelled by the best of all deterrents—the opinion of the men themselves.

In every other ship in the Fleet the return of the liberty-men from the shore was followed by meetings

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held either on the forecastle or in the recreation spaces or on the mess decks. The men who had been ashore had to acquaint their messmates who had remained on board of the plans and organisation for the morrow.

Normally, the petty officers in a ship are in a position to judge the feeling of the men and to report to the officers if anything untoward is afoot. It is true, however, that the provision of special enclosed messes for the petty officers has reduced to a large extent the ability of the petty officers to have their fingers upon the pulse of lower deck feeling. At Invergordon there is no doubt that a large number of petty officers were fully aware of the plans for the morrow, yet only in one or two isolated cases did they carry out their duty of informing the officers. The reason for this is not far to seek.

The petty officers, being men holding a responsible rating which they might lose—and with it a considerable proportion of their pay—did not wish actively to be concerned in the project of the men for active and undisciplined protest against the reductions in pay. At the same time their sympathies and therefore their loyalties, rested to a very large extent with the men. The sympathy of the petty officers was a factor of the Invergordon mutiny of which the officers were fully aware, and one which dictated to a great extent the attitude and actions of the officers during the mutiny—a fact which

seems never to have been fully appreciated by the Admiralty.

Later on Monday night, in one of the cruisers of the Second Cruiser Squadron, the master-at-arms—who is chief of the police in a warship—reported to the captain that he believed that the men were considering a refusal of duty next morning if H.M.S. *Rodney* failed to leave harbour at the arranged time of 7 a.m. The Commanding Officer of the cruiser immediately went over to H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* and reported this information personally to Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron.

When he heard this report, Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton said that, if he had his way, he would take his squadron to sea immediately in order to clear the air. There was, however, nothing which could be done except send the report to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson in H.M.S. *Hood*. It was not for an individual ship or an individual squadron to act without orders from the Admiral in command of the Fleet.

There are to this day many naval officers who hold that the proper action would have been to send all the ships to sea and disperse them as widely as possible. Such a proceeding might well have proved effective if it had been possible one or two days earlier, but those who maintain in the light of after events that such a course should have been adopted, fail to realise that it was at this juncture very likely impossible, and that to attempt it might

have led to a far more serious crisis. Such action could hardly in justice have been taken before the night of Monday, September 14th, because the officers were not aware of the course being taken by the men—the Admiralty letter which might have put things right had only been distributed at noon on this day, just before half the crews were landed for shore leave.

Since the loyalty of the petty officers was lukewarm, and, at best, a very doubtful quantity, it seems probable that an order for the ships to proceed to sea on the night of Monday, September 14th, would have led to an immediate outbreak of mutiny and a refusal to take the ships to sea. Such an event, in the inflamed state of the men on that night, would have entailed grave risk of the mutiny becoming directed against the officers instead of against a decision of Whitehall.

Throughout the mutiny at Invergordon, the first consideration of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had to be to preserve, so far as possible, the mutual sympathy between officers and men. It has taken the Royal Navy five years to recover from the mutiny at Invergordon. Had any form of "strong action" been taken by the officers it would almost certainly have led to a collapse of the good feeling between officers and men—the foundation of all discipline—and possibly also to violence and bloodshed. If that had happened, the Navy would not have recovered in a quarter of a century, and in the meantime the British Empire might well have disintegrated.

XIII

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TUESDAY, September 15th, 1931, dawned fine and clear. There was not a breath of wind, and the Scottish Firth seemed very still, with the grey ships lying like models upon a mirror. The stillness of the weather during this and the following day was an important point in favour of the plans of the mutineers, for in the surrounding silence cheers carried further and sounded louder and more encouraging. The warm autumn sunshine also helped the cause of mutiny. Men enjoyed massing on the forecastles of the ships and cheering to keep up their own courage and that of their fellows in the other ships. Had this Tuesday been a cold and blustery day, with a high wind and driving rain, the history of the Invergordon mutiny would probably have been very different.

When, early in the morning, the bugles sounded the reveille and the regulating petty officers or ships' police went round below the slung hammocks exhorting the men to "Show a leg" and "Lash up and stow," there was some trouble in a few of the ships. Some of the men refused to turn out of their hammocks.

"Show a leg" and "Lash up and stow," the two shouts which jerk the sailor back to consciousness

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every morning, are interesting expressions. "Lash up and stow" is the order to lash up the hammocks, bedding inside, into a neat sausage-shaped bundle, which is then stowed in the "hammock nettings," as the stowage places for hammocks are called. The exhortation to "show a leg" has been handed down from the bad old days when women were allowed to live on board men-of-war. By showing a leg the occupant of a hammock gave earnest of sex to the ship's police below. The hairy shin of a seaman appearing over the edge of a hammock meant that its owner was mercilessly turned out, but if a shapely ankle appeared the hammock was left undisturbed.

The trouble over turning out was not serious, and it was short lived. In most of the ships the men scrubbed the decks as on any normal day. It was obvious, however, that this was no ordinary day. There was an atmosphere of tension, and the men seemed to be more intent upon casting anxious glances at the other ships than on the decks they scrubbed. At this early hour, however, there was no sign of open and organised mutiny in the majority of the ships, and there was no cheering from ship to ship. The sign for the general outbreak of mutiny—the failure of H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* to go to sea at the appointed time—had not yet been given.

In H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* there were already unmistakable signs of open mutiny. This

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was particularly the case in H.M.S. *Valiant*. H.M.S. *Valiant* was moored to seaward of H.M.S. *Rodney*, and was therefore to leave harbour first, a few minutes before 7 a.m. In both ships the work of hoisting boats, and preparing for sea was greatly impeded by the men, many of whom not only refused to work, and kept on disappearing down to the mess decks upon the flimsiest provocations, but did their best to obstruct the work of others.

In H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Rodney* the work of hoisting boats and accommodation ladders, and unrigging the booms, was carried out almost entirely by the officers and midshipmen, assisted by the petty officers and leading seamen, who did not wish to be actively concerned in mutiny. H.M.S. *Rodney* was secured to a buoy, but in H.M.S. *Valiant* the hard work of unmooring and weighing the first anchor was also carried out by the officers. By dint of great efforts on the part of the officers, the two battleships were ready for sea at the appointed time.

When the time came for the cable of the remaining anchor in H.M.S. *Valiant* to be "shortened in" so as to be in instant readiness for weighing, the men on the forecastle adopted a pre-arranged plan of passive resistance to prevent the officers from weighing the anchor and taking the ship to sea. They stood upon and around the great anchor cable, and many men sat down upon it. To attempt to heave in the cable and weigh the anchor

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under such conditions would have involved the infliction of terrible injuries upon many of these men.

Efforts were made by the officers to persuade the men to move, but these met with no success. The men remained silent and immovable, preventing, by their mere presence upon the cables, the great battleships from being taken to sea.

In the circumstances there was only one course open to the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Valiant*, which, according to the orders, was to precede H.M.S. *Rodney* out of harbour—to report to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, commanding the Fleet, that his men were in open mutiny and that he was unable to take his ship to sea in accordance with his orders.

The quickest method of informing Rear-Admiral Tomkinson would have been to make the report by signal in “plain language”—that is, not in code. But a signal in “plain language” passing from one ship to another can be, and very often is, read by ships other than the addressee, and, not unnaturally, the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Valiant* did not wish to advertise the fact that men under his command had mutinied. He accordingly adopted the method of communication known as a “boat message.” That is, he wrote a brief report and sent it in a sealed envelope by boat to H.M.S. *Hood* for immediate delivery to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson.

This message confirmed the report which had reached Rear-Admiral Tomkinson late the previous

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night from the Rear-Admiral commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron. It is probable, also, that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had formed definite opinions of the measures which might be adopted by the men of the Fleet in face of the extraordinary treatment which they had been accorded by the Admiralty.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson now had to make a quick decision which was likely to affect the whole future of the British Empire—a decision complicated by the fact that he was only temporarily in command of the Fleet and had held that command only for a few days, so that he was virtually unknown to the men of the battleships and cruisers. He could not, therefore, rely upon his personal influence having any appreciable effect upon the crews of the ships. It was obvious that at this most dangerous moment his chief duty was to preserve any remnants of discipline which might remain, and at all costs to avoid violence and any tendency for the action of the men to become mutiny against the officers rather than a protest against grievances. Moreover, while Rear-Admiral Tomkinson never condoned the unconstitutional and undisciplined action of the men, he was fully aware that the men had legitimate grievances which would have to be fully investigated and removed before any lasting restoration of real discipline and good feeling could be expected.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson made his decision. He

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decided not to take any steps which might make matters infinitely worse, and which at the best could only stave off the investigation and settlement of the legitimate grievances of the men. He cancelled the sailing orders of H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Valiant* and of the two battle cruisers, and he recalled H.M.S. *Malaya* (which ship had anchored overnight off Nairn), in order that full investigation of the grievances of the men should proceed immediately throughout the Fleet. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson then ordered the Commanding Officers of all ships to investigate the grievances of their men without delay.

The cancellation of the sailing orders was received by H.M.S. *Rodney* before that ship had unshackled her cables from the buoy.

It was by now nearly 8 a.m. Guards and bands of the Royal Marines paraded in the traditional manner in nearly every ship for the hoisting of the ensigns. Respect of the flag and of time-honoured tradition proved in most cases stronger than the toxin of mutiny—as did also the respectful treatment of officers. When, however, immediately after the colours had been hoisted, the bugles sounded for the men to fall in for work, the mutiny became general. The sign had been given. H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Rodney* remained in harbour. In nearly every ship in the Fleet the bugle call for “both watches” to fall in for work was obeyed only by petty officers, leading seamen, non-commissioned

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officers of the Royal Marines, and a very small percentage of the other ratings. Nearly all the latter were men of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve who were undergoing training with the Fleet. Throughout the mutiny the men of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve remained loyal.

Cheering now broke out from the ships' companies of most of the ships moored in the Firth, the men having ignored the bugle calls and massed on the forecastles of their ships in order to bring the "cheering code" into operation. In a very short time the mutiny was complete. Nearly 12,000 men had refused to obey orders to fall in for work.

Intimidation was immediately resorted to in dealing with the very small minority of loyal seamen who obeyed orders. In H.M.S. *Norfolk* a single able seaman obeyed the order when "both watches" were ordered to fall in after the hoisting of the colours. This man was not seen again until the following day, when he appeared with two black eyes and with some of his front teeth missing. It was afterwards discovered that he had been severely manhandled as a "blackleg" by the mutineers.

The mutiny was by no means confined to the upper deck. The stokers had also refused duty—in fact, the first intimation of general mutiny came, in some ships, when the stokers refused to turn to and start their work below at 8 a.m.

Of the ships lying off Invergordon, H.M.S. *York* alone was not seriously affected by the mutiny.

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H.M.S. *Malaya* had left Nairn and was steaming towards her exercise area when the order to return to Invergordon was received.

The Admiralty letter announcing and explaining the reductions in pay had been received on board H.M.S. *Malaya* on the previous evening, when a drifter had brought the mails to H.M.S. *Malaya* at Nairn from Invergordon. The letter had not been read out to the men when the order to return to harbour was received. On receipt of this signal the lower deck of H.M.S. *Malaya* was cleared and the ship's company mustered aft on the quarter deck. Standing on the top of the after 15-inch gun turret, the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Malaya* addressed his men. He told them that indiscipline had broken out among many of the ships at Invergordon, and appealed to them to refrain from joining in any such movement and to put forward in the proper manner any grievances with regard to the pay cuts. This speech was on the whole well received, though there were some mutterings of discontent and a few men characterised the speech as "soft soap."

Immediately after this speech the officers in charge of divisions in H.M.S. *Malaya* were ordered to read out the Admiralty letter to the men of their divisions. The Admiralty letter was criticised by the men as "soft soap," and there was a great deal of muttering at the terms of the reductions in pay. The men in H.M.S. *Malaya* did not then take any action, but the pay cuts were widely and bitterly discussed

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by the men after they had been dismissed. The ship was, however, steaming back to Invergordon, and any decision on the part of the men was postponed until after their arrival.

Meanwhile at Invergordon matters were going from bad to worse, in spite of the fact that in most ships the men had mustered and had been addressed by their Commanding Officers, who warned them of the consequences of their actions and ordered them to state their grievances in the proper manner to the officers in charge of divisions.

This was the last occasion during the mutiny on which the crews of most of the ships consented to muster as a whole in order to be addressed by the officers. The refusal of the men to muster properly to be addressed by their officers proved to be one of the most embarrassing features of the mutiny. To a great extent it deprived the officers of the opportunity of persuading their men of the folly of their actions. In order to attempt to do this the officers henceforth had to go forward to the fore-castle or down to the mess decks and meet the men on their own ground. This course was adopted in several cases, but always with some misgivings, since to force the presence of officers upon men in a state of open mutiny might easily have provoked an incident of violence against officers which would at once have placed the mutiny upon an infinitely more serious footing.

After the Commanding Officers had addressed

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their men, the bugle call for men to fall in by divisions was sounded. The intention was that the men would then fall in by divisions and be persuaded to state their grievances to the officers in charge of their divisions, who, by their office, were responsible for the welfare of the men of their particular divisions. The order to fall in by divisions was ignored and the men mustered on the fore-castles of most of the ships.

Cheering from ship to ship was by this time rife. In no ship then anchored off Invergordon except H.M.S. *York* did men obey orders to fall in for work. Yet there was much work going on on board H.M.S. *Valiant*. This ship had been unmoored—that is, the mooring swivel had been taken off the cables and one anchor had been weighed—preparatory to going to sea for exercises in accordance with the orders for the day. The ship had to be re-moored, for, if it had remained at single anchor, it would have swung in too large a circle when the tide turned and might have fouled other ships. The seamen refused to re-moor the ship and the stokers refused to work the capstan engine. The mutineers who had refused to allow the ship to be taken to sea refused to make it safe for the ship to remain in harbour. All this work had, therefore, to be performed by the officers, assisted by petty officers and some leading seamen. Meanwhile the remainder of the crew stood about and watched.

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Although no work was being carried out by the men of the Fleet, and although the men refused time after time to fall in for work when ordered to do so, the operation of the social services of the Fleet was continued by the men. Boats ran from ship to ship when ordered to do so. Steam for lighting and other auxiliary purposes was kept in the boilers. The ordinary routine of keeping the ships and the mess decks clean was carried out. None of this was done in response to orders. The mutineers continued these services of their own free will. Moreover, except in a few isolated cases, the usual marks of respect were paid to officers. In one ship, when an able seaman who should have worked in the wardroom officers' pantry refused duty, he was driven back to his work with threats by the mutineers.

The continued operation of what may be termed the social services of the Fleet, and the respect paid to officers in nearly every case, were extraordinary features of the Invergordon mutiny. The mutiny as a whole, in fact, was one of the most orderly mutinies in history. The vast majority of the men showed themselves capable of acting with restraint when discipline had broken down. They even continued to exact a discipline of their own under their own "sailors' soviet."

Out of all the ships concerned in the mutiny at Invergordon—the battle cruisers *Hood* and *Repulse*, the battleships *Nelson*, *Rodney*, *Warspite*, *Malaya*, and

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Valiant, and the cruisers *Dorsetshire*, *Norfolk*, *York*, *Exeter*, and *Adventure*—there were only two ships in which there was even a threat of violence to officers. These ships were the battleship *Valiant* and the mine-laying cruiser *Adventure*, and the crews of both these ships had shown themselves to be below the average standard before September 1931.

In most ships the efforts of the divisional officers to come to grips with the outlook of their men and to persuade them to put forward their grievances in a proper manner proved fruitless. Yet the policy of peaceful persuasion by officers, which was wisely adopted in preference to any attempt at "strong action," did have some effect in the ships which were less seriously affected. It became more and more apparent in some of these ships that it was only the constant use of the "cheering code" by their crews, and those of the ships around them which prevented the return to duty of at least a proportion of the men.

In the ships more seriously affected, however, the mutiny remained throughout Tuesday and Wednesday on the verge of deteriorating into utter chaos. Particularly was this true in H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*. In these ships many of the young ordinary seamen and boys, who had only recently joined the Royal Navy and were unaffected by the reductions in pay, joined the mutineers in a spirit of sheer hooliganism.

It was with these young men that the real

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danger lay. They seized the opportunity offered by the mutiny to behave in the most disgraceful manner, rushing about the ships and often destroying fittings for the sheer joy of destruction. They offered disrespect, and in many cases insults, to officers. In H.M.S. *Valiant* a gang of these young hooligans went so far as to threaten violence to an officer, who was forced to lock himself in his cabin so that a serious incident might be avoided. They also made attempts to loot the canteen, the book-stall, and the ship's stores. In H.M.S. *Adventure* some of them threatened to throw one of the officers overboard, and came near to carrying out the threat.

These young men had no grievances whatever under the proposed reductions in pay, and it is significant that in both the ships in which they were a party to the mutiny, to any extent beyond refusing duty in sympathy with the able seamen, the crews as a whole were already of low morale and left much to be desired.

Faced with such threats, which might at any moment have led to an incident capable of transforming the whole mutiny into the chaos of gang warfare, urgent precautions had to be taken. Revolver racks were stripped. "Ready use" ammunition lockers were emptied. Officers were placed as sentries in wireless offices and over the keyboards on which the keys of the magazines were kept. Normally, the sentry over the magazine keys

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is a Royal Marine. Traditionally, the Royal Marines in a British warship form the "after guard," and from the earliest days of the Corps it has been the duty of the Royal Marines to stand firm between the officers and the seamen in the event of mutiny. At Invergordon, however, the Royal Marines in many of the ships joined in the mutiny, unmindful of the fact that, unlike the sailors, they were "sworn men."

In a modern warship it is, of course, impossible, as it was in the old days when all the muskets were kept in a single "arms chest," to prevent men from getting possession of rifles and bayonets. In the warships of the present day these are stowed in racks along the bulkheads, not only of the officers' quarters, but extending forward into the mess decks. The risk of some of the young hooligans among the mutineers seizing and using a bayonet had, therefore, to be accepted, but every precaution was taken to see that no rifle ammunition was available.

In H.M.S. *Norfolk* the Commanding Officer ordered the executive officer to go forward among the men and try the effect of ordering the men back to duty individually, calling upon each one by name. In this task the executive officer was supported by the officers in charge of divisions. This attempt to get the men to return to duty failed. On the approach of the officers the men scattered, and refused to allow them to approach to close quarters

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at which speech to individuals was possible. Moreover, no sooner was a man addressed by name than he disappeared into the crowd of his messmates.

The executive officer of H.M.S. *Norfolk*—an officer for whom the men had a great respect—then made a short statement to the men. In this he told them that he was aware of their grievances, and that, if they would file past him one by one, he would take their statements of hardship produced by the proposed pay cuts and see that they were immediately forwarded for the consideration of the higher command.

The men, however, had been given demonstration time and again in recent years of the ineffectiveness of this method of expressing grievances. They refused to do as the executive officer wished. The officer then told the men that they could make statements to the officers in charge of their divisions, who would remain on the fore-castle for this purpose. This means of stating their grievances was again refused, except by a few men, who made somewhat non-committal statements in this way.

Able Seaman Wincott, however, said that he would make a collective statement on behalf of the men if the officer in charge of his division would lend him his portable typewriter on which to type out a statement. The officer lent his typewriter, but it was not used by Able Seaman Wincott to prepare the group statement which he had promised. The promise of a group statement was, in

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fact, nothing more than a ruse to secure the typewriter, which Wincott required for quite another purpose.

Having secured the typewriter, Able Seaman Wincott convened a meeting of a few select ratings—the members of the “sailors’ soviet” in H.M.S. *Norfolk*. This meeting took place on the forecastle, and Wincott drafted a manifesto. This manifesto, having been approved by the meeting, was read out to the men of H.M.S. *Norfolk*. They agreed to it, whereupon Able Seaman Wincott set about typing out several copies. The manifesto, which was later read out in the House of Commons, was as follows:

“We, the loyal subjects of His Majesty the King, do hereby present to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty our earnest representations to them to revise the drastic cuts in pay that have been inflicted upon the lowest men on the lower deck. It is evident to all concerned that these cuts are the forerunner of tragedy, poverty, and immorality amongst the families of the men of the lower deck. The men are quite willing to accept a cut, which they, the men, think within reason, and unless this is done, we must remain as one unit refusing to serve under the new rates of pay.”

The wording of this manifesto is remarkable in that it so accurately described the attitude of the vast majority of the men of the Fleet—an attitude of underlying loyalty forced into the background behind mutiny by unjust and thoughtless action on

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the part of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. It is remarkable also in that, having been drafted by Able Seaman Wincott, it differed so fundamentally from the speech made by Wincott at the canteen ashore on Sunday night, when he had made a scathing attack upon practically all naval expenditure other than the pay of the men. This difference reflected the variation in tactics between Wincott the agitator persuading his mess-mates to action and Wincott the leader once action had been taken.

The typed copies of this manifesto were circulated from "sailors' soviet" to "sailors' soviet" throughout the ships of the Fleet. This was done through the medium of the boats, which continued to run in accordance with the policy of the mutineers in not interrupting the "social services" of the Fleet. Copies were passed surreptitiously to a member of the crew of the motor-boat. This man, on visits to other ships, distributed copies to be passed on by the crews of the boats of the other ships. In this way copies of the manifesto were circulated to every ship in the Fleet before the end of the day, and there is no doubt that their receipt played no small part in maintaining the solidarity of the mutiny.

Meanwhile Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had reported to the Admiralty. He outlined the disaffection among the men of the Fleet under his temporary command consequent upon the announcement of the forthcoming reductions in pay,

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and he reported that he had suspended the programme of exercises ordered for the Fleet and had recalled ships to harbour while investigations were being made into representations of the hardships occasioned by the proposed pay cuts.

During the whole of the remainder of the forenoon of Tuesday, September 15th, the men of most of the ships at Invergordon remained on the forecastles of their ships. At the routine times at which men ought to have fallen in for work, bursts of cheering broke out from practically every ship and echoed up and down the Firth. Cheering also broke out on every occasion when it was seen that the men of any ship were mustering aft in order to be addressed by an officer.

Meanwhile events at Rosyth had shown that, while the great majority of men were puzzled and hurt by the imposition of the pay cuts, their underlying loyalty had remained unimpaired.

H.M.S. *Iron Duke* was the only large ship at Rosyth, and, as a training-ship, she had a special complement of picked men. On the morning after the first news of the reductions in naval pay was received, a very large number of men in H.M.S. *Iron Duke* preferred "requests" to see their officers in order that these might explain the position. The officers were still in the dark, and the "requests" were accordingly forwarded by the officers in charge of divisions to the executive officer, and by him to the Commanding Officer.

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Very few of these requests had actually reached the Commanding Officer when he addressed his men. He made little attempt to explain the cuts in pay, but he told his ship's company quite frankly that he had no power to rescind the reductions, and that, if he had, his first act would probably be to abolish the cut imposed upon himself. This immediately brought home to the men the fact that their Commanding Officer was suffering in the same way as themselves. The Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Iron Duke* took immense trouble to investigate personally every case of hardship brought before him. As a result of his action, and the special quality of the ship's company, the morale of the men of H.M.S. *Iron Duke* remained unimpaired.

Agitators, however, were doing their best to spread the mutiny which had broken out at Invergordon to the ships lying at Rosyth. In the canteen at Rosyth that evening a stoker from H.M.S. *Greenwich* jumped on the counter and began to incite the men to mutiny. His action was strongly resented by the men present in the canteen, and he was not only stripped of the uniform which he had disgraced but severely handled and thrown out of the canteen.

Nevertheless, as far south as Chatham, the spectre of mutiny was raising its head in the Royal Navy. At Chatham lay the cruiser H.M.S. *Durban*, which was preparing to sail for South America,

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wearing the Broad Pendant of the Commodore of the South American division of the America and West Indies Station.

As soon as the extent of the forthcoming reductions in naval pay became known, the ship's company of H.M.S. *Durban* informed their Commanding Officer, through a number of chosen representatives, that they would refuse to sail for South America until they received definite assurance that their grievances with regard to the pay cuts were to be removed.

Appreciating that the men had genuine grievances, and that they were determined to stand by their decision not to sail until these had been removed, the Commanding Officer immediately went to London to report the position personally to the Admiralty. Before leaving Chatham he promised the men of H.M.S. *Durban* that he would do all in his power to secure the removal of their grievances. This promise was given on condition that, during the absence of their Commanding Officer, the ship's company of H.M.S. *Durban* would continue to carry out their duties in the normal manner.

Thus there was no actual outbreak of mutiny in H.M.S. *Durban* at Chatham, and the ship sailed for Portsmouth while the Commanding Officer was still at the Admiralty.

On September 18th, the day on which the ships of the Chatham and Portsmouth contingents of the

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Atlantic Fleet reached their home ports, H.M.S. *Durban* arrived at Portsmouth, where she was to remain pending the completion of the inquiries into the hardships which would be caused if the proposed reductions of pay were brought into force.

After the inquiries were completed and the reductions in naval pay had been reduced by order of the Government to a universal cut of not more than 10 per cent, H.M.S. *Durban* left Portsmouth and continued her voyage to Pernambuco, where she was to take up her duties on the South America Station.

No steps, however, were taken to remove from the ship those men who had been instrumental in producing the threat of mutiny at Chatham. The result was that disaffection continued, and it broke out into serious mutiny at the Falkland Islands on Christmas Eve, 1931. As a result, four ringleaders were kept in the cells until the ship arrived at Telcahuane, in Chile, three weeks later, where they were transferred, under arrest, to a ship leaving for England. It was not until March 1932 that H.M.S. *Durban* arrived at the British naval port of Bermuda. There, as the result of further investigation into the mutiny at the Falkland Islands, the remaining twenty men who had taken part in the mutiny were dismissed from the Royal Navy.

In a ship visiting the United States of America the news of the mutiny at Invergordon led to what, in

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industry, would be termed a "sympathetic strike" among men of a British cruiser.

The day after the outbreak of mutiny in the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon the ship's company of the cruiser H.M.S. *Delhi*, then at New Brunswick, read the news in the American newspapers and decided to support the action of their fellows at Invergordon. H.M.S. *Delhi* was then being prepared for sea preparatory to a visit to New York. During the forenoon the men had been employed in washing the ship's side and cleaning the ship generally. After dinner, when "both watches" were called to fall in to continue work, hardly a man obeyed the order. The executive officer of the ship thereupon called up the Royal Marines. These men did not appear either, and at the subsequent inquiry they claimed that they were unable to obey the order because the seamen had shut the hatches leading to their mess deck—which was below that of the seamen.

Matters seemed serious in H.M.S. *Delhi*, but the Commander-in-Chief—Vice-Admiral Sir Vernon Haggard—made a conciliatory statement to the men in which he assured them that he would prosecute their grievances with the utmost energy. He also assured them that there would be no victimisation if they returned to duty forthwith. This they did, but the visit of H.M.S. *Delhi* to New York was cancelled, and the ship returned to her base at Bermuda.

XIV

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THE ship's company of H.M.S. *Malaya* had their dinners early on Tuesday September 15th so as to be able to have their full dinner-hour before men were required to prepare the ship for entering harbour. It was shortly after 12.30 that H.M.S. *Malaya* passed between the high headlands of the Sutors at the entrance to the Firth.

Off Nigg the *Malaya* passed the battle cruiser *Repulse*, and the traditional compliments of sounding the "Still" were exchanged. There seemed nothing remarkable about H.M.S. *Repulse*, and, in fact, this ship, being moored some distance from the main Fleet, was never seriously affected by the mutiny. It was true that there were a large number of men strolling up and down and smoking on the forecastle of H.M.S. *Repulse*, but there was nothing unusual in this, since it was towards the end of the normal dinner-hour for the crews of ships in harbour.

The next ship which H.M.S. *Malaya* passed, some distance further up the Firth, was H.M.S. *Nelson*. H.M.S. *Nelson* at once demonstrated to the officers and men of H.M.S. *Malaya* how serious was the mutiny. The tide was on the turn, and the ships in the Firth were swung with their bows pointing

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south. Thus a ship entering harbour had to pass the forecastles of the moored ships. On the fore-castle of H.M.S. *Nelson* was a mass of men. As H.M.S. *Malaya* approached, these began cheering and shouting slogans. It was the obvious intention of the mutineers to secure the support of the men of H.M.S. *Malaya* without delay. In this they failed almost entirely, due to the wise measures taken in H.M.S. *Malaya* to keep the men away, as far as possible from the danger of contamination.

As H.M.S. *Malaya* approached closer to the bows of H.M.S. *Nelson*, the men of the *Malaya* witnessed the enaction of an extraordinary drama upon the long fore-castle of the *Nelson*. At first a slight commotion was noticed towards the after end of the crowd of over 800 men. The commotion travelled forward through the crowd, and then it could be seen that it was the officer of the watch, accompanied by a bugler, shouldering his way through the mass of mutineers. The two reached the extreme bows of H.M.S. *Nelson* just in time to reply to the compliment of H.M.S. *Malaya* and sound the "Still" on the bugle in reply. A great risk had been taken, but a tradition of the Royal Navy had been upheld even under conditions of open mutiny.

As the bugler in the bows of H.M.S. *Nelson* sounded the "Still" and the officer of the watch stood rigid at the salute in the eyes of the ship, the mutinous mob of sailors behind him instinctively kept silence and stiffened to attention. For one brief

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moment long training overcame all other considerations. Then the bugle sounded the "Carry On." The officer of the watch turned to make his way once more through the crowded sailors. Immediately a storm of cheering broke from nearly a thousand throats on the forecastle of H.M.S. *Nelson*. For a few seconds mutiny had wavered in the balance. The men had to persuade themselves and to demonstrate to other ships that the incident was of no account, and that the *Nelson* still stood firm in mutiny as a protest against the pay cuts.

H.M.S. *Malaya* passed on, and began mooring ship in her berth next to seaward of H.M.S. *Valiant*. Throughout the long process of mooring ship there was almost continual cheering from H.M.S. *Valiant* and from H.M.S. *Adventure*, which ship was in the cruiser line to the southward of the battleship line, and almost abreast H.M.S. *Malaya*.

Naturally, with the great majority of the personnel of the Fleet in a state of open mutiny, no shore leave was granted on the afternoon of Tuesday, September 15th, and no men made any attempt to go ashore without permission. Their organised protest against the reductions in pay was working well, and the operation of the "cheering code" was proving sufficient inter-ship communication for most matters, while the manifesto was being successfully distributed by the crews of boats in league with the mutineers.

It was as well that none of the mutineers did go

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ashore either on this or the following afternoon. The news of trouble had spread rapidly, and already the bleak little town of Invergordon was beginning to fill up. Professional agitators from Clydeside and elsewhere, journalists being driven almost mad by inability to get into direct touch with the mutineers, sightseers, and the merely curious, were arriving by car and by every one of the infrequent trains. By dusk the whole length of the coast road along the shore of the Firth from Invergordon to beyond Saltburn was fringed with motor-cars. The Royal Navy was not to be allowed to pass through its crisis with any privacy, even in that normally deserted Scottish Firth.

With no shore leave, and the universal refusal to do any work, beyond maintaining the essential services of the Fleet, the mutineers spent the whole of that fine afternoon and evening on the forecastles of their ships, bursting into cheers and the shouting of slogans at frequent intervals. Most of the cheers and the slogans were directed at the crew of the newly arrived H.M.S. *Malaya*, and there was much shouting in unison of "Don't let us down, *Malaya*," and so on.

Soon after the *Malaya* had finished mooring ship, H.M.S. *Exeter* arrived at Invergordon from the south, where she had been "working up," having only commissioned on July 21st, 1931. She was a new cruiser which had been built and commissioned at Devonport, and she was now joining

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up with the Second Cruiser Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet.

Amazing events greeted this ship as she joined the Atlantic Fleet for the first time. On her passage to Scottish waters H.M.S. *Exeter* had heard nothing of the events which had been happening at Invergordon. Being a new ship joining her consorts for the first time, officers and men had been busily engaged in making sure that the entry of the ship into the Fleet anchorage at Invergordon would be marred by no blemish. Experience had taught them that the most critical faculties of officers and men are always aroused by the first appearance of a new ship.

As H.M.S. *Exeter* steamed up the Firth and passed the seaward ships she was greeted by cheers from these ships. The *Exeter* was pleased. It seemed to show that there was no fault to be found with her, and officers and men were gratified by what they took to be a spontaneous and wonderful welcome from her consorts. Under this impression the ship's company of H.M.S. *Exeter* returned what were thought to be compliments, and cheered in reply. Thus there came about the extraordinary situation in which loyal men who knew nothing of the mutiny answered the cheers of mutineers and gave them the impression that H.M.S. *Exeter* was also in a state of mutiny.

Meanwhile, further attempts had been made by the officers of the ships in mutiny to persuade the

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men to return to duty. This was made the more difficult because the men were reluctant to muster in order to hear what the officers had to say. This was partly owing to the influence of the more extreme elements in each ship, who did everything possible to prevent the men listening to their officers for fear that this might lead to a weakening on the part of the men, and partly because of the cheering and gibes which echoed over the water from the other ships in the vicinity if the men of any ship showed signs of mustering willingly and in force in order to hear what their officers had to say.

In spite of this tendency, however, officers were able from time to time to address considerable numbers of their men. The line of argument adopted by the officers, and the manner in which this was received by the men, can perhaps best be expressed in the words of the private diary of an officer of one of the ships.

“The men were told that their grievances were being forwarded to the Admiralty, and that no man who had mentioned a grievance was referred to by name in the official report. It was pointed out to the men that there was no further cause for refusal of duty. Unfortunately, this statement to the men coincided with continuous cheering on board *H.M.S. Rodney*. ‘Both watches for exercise’ were sounded off directly after the commanding officer had addressed the men.” [This was the bugle call ordering all seamen to fall in in order to be told

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off for work.] "Only two men other than as before remained" [i.e. other than the petty officers, leading seamen, and ratings of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve under training]. "The remainder returned to the mess decks. The cheering from other ships had, unfortunately, a stimulating effect upon their resistance to duty."

It may be said in defence of the mutineers that, even at this juncture, after the repeated warnings of officers, comparatively few of the men realised that their actions amounted to nothing less than open mutiny under the terms of the Naval Discipline Act. The average sailor thinks of mutiny as action against his officers—of riots in which officers are murdered and thrown overboard. This archaic view of the definition of mutiny had been consciously encouraged by the agitators when the plans for the mutiny had been under preparation at the canteen ashore. It was for this reason that the mutiny was never referred to as such by the mutineers, but always called a "strike." Men who took part in the mutiny averred afterwards that "we were not disloyal or mutinying, but fighting for our rights."

Behind this misconception among the men of the seriousness of their action lay the growing awareness of the past few years of the fact that other working communities throughout the country could force their demands through with impunity by the use of the strike weapon. It seemed to the sailors incredible that they should be debarred under the most

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provocative circumstances from adopting a course of action which was open to other workers throughout the country, and which was openly approved by a political party which had, until a few days before, been ruling the country.

The belief of the men that they were not actually guilty of mutiny was given tacit confirmation by all the public announcements in Parliament, Press, and in the official statements issued by the Admiralty in connection with the mutiny. The word "unrest" was freely used. "Disaffection" was another term used, as was also "strike" and "collective action." The only occasion upon which the word "mutiny" was publicly used was in the extreme anti-Left *Morning Post*—and even then it was used with what amounted to an apology to public feeling: "To use plain language, which is not fashionable nowadays, they committed a mutiny." Mutiny is a hard word. Those who wished to minimise the events at Invergordon instinctively shied away from it. In doing so they did the Navy a disservice, since they encouraged the continuance of a spirit which was for mutiny—nothing less—in the oldest and most loyal and indispensable of the fighting Services of the British Empire.

That the continuous use of the "cheering code" was a factor of the first importance in upholding the spirit of the mutineers was widely recognised by the officers throughout the Fleet, and many attempts

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were made to prevent the men from cheering. Most of the officers in command of ships held conferences with their officers during the afternoon and evening of Tuesday, September 15th. In most cases these conferences were concerned with the co-ordination of a common line of action to be taken by all officers in their dealings with the mutineers. In the majority of the ships, officers were told to exercise the greatest care and tact in order to avoid the danger of violence and the collapse of the authority which the officers undoubtedly still retained in nearly all the ships. At the same time they were told that whenever opportunity offered they were to try to check acts of blatant insubordination, and particularly to restrain cheering and the shouting of slogans by the men.

In some ships a second officer of the watch was stationed on the bridge, where he could look down upon the men on the forecastle and try to check cheering when it could be seen that it was about to break out. In a few cases these measures had some slight effect, but on the whole the cheering from ship to ship through the Fleet continued unabated.

Meanwhile, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson's signal reporting the events at Invergordon had been received at the Admiralty. Naturally, the signal had been made in code in order to prevent it being intercepted and read by unauthorised persons.

The signal did not reach the Admiralty until late in the afternoon. Then it had to be decoded by an

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officer before being promulgated to such of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty who were not away on leave, and to other authorities concerned. Moreover, as soon as the purport of the signal was understood, extra precautions had to be taken to prevent any leakage of information. This added to the time which elapsed before the signal, in comprehensible "plain language," reached the members of the Board of Admiralty and other officers directly concerned.

While the signal was being promulgated and considered in the Admiralty, secrecy was well observed. Even naval officers whose duties kept them in the Admiralty until after 6 p.m. had, when they left the Admiralty, no inkling of what had happened.

Rumour, however, had been busy, and already disquieting scraps of news had begun to filter into Fleet Street from the north of Scotland. The newspaper offices, scenting a "big story," did everything in their power to get confirmation and full details. For details they telephoned in vain on the congested line to Invergordon. For confirmation they telephoned to the Admiralty. For some little time no confirmation was forthcoming, and an officer was kept fully employed explaining to relays of newspaper representatives that nothing official was yet known.

Then the Admiralty issued its first official statement. "The Senior Officer, Atlantic Fleet, has

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reported that the promulgation of the reduced rates of naval pay has led to unrest among a proportion of the lower ratings. In consequence of this he has deemed it desirable to suspend the programme of exercises of the Fleet and to recall ships to harbour while investigations are being made into representations of the hardship occasioned by certain of the cuts in pay, in order that these may be reported for the consideration of the Board of Admiralty."

By the time this statement was issued the last editions of the evening papers had already been produced, and the first the public knew of the mutiny at Invergordon was when this Admiralty statement was read out in the B.B.C. news bulletin at 9 p.m. Rumour had, however, already percolated to that most sensitive of all organisms—the financial interests of the City of London. Stock-brokers in the City tried to obtain confirmation or denial from friends and relations connected with the Royal Navy. In most cases they got a provisional denial, for the mere idea of mutiny in the Royal Navy was utterly incredible to all who were connected with that great Service. Yet only a few hours later the official Admiralty statement was read out to millions of listeners by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

This first official statement was issued somewhat hurriedly in order to stave off, for the moment at least, the clamourings of the Press. Even before this first statement was issued there was great activity

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within the Admiralty. Officers were hurriedly recalled from their homes or their clubs. Members of the Board of Admiralty who were on leave were recalled by urgent telegrams. A meeting of the Board of Admiralty was hastily convened in order to consider the situation and frame a line of policy in face of this most unheard-of occurrence.

The meeting of the Board of Admiralty was short. With the sparse information at its disposal there was not very much to be considered, and it was obvious that only one line of action lay open—to trust the officer in command on the spot pending the receipt of further and more detailed information.

Immediately after the meeting of the Board of Admiralty a further statement was issued to the Press. This stated that "Their Lordships have approved of the exercises of the Atlantic Fleet being temporarily suspended while certain representations of hardship under new rates of pay are being investigated for the consideration of their Lordships."

In the light of after events it is worthy of note that, in default of information in sufficient detail to enable the Board of Admiralty to formulate its own policy, the Admiralty issued a statement fully approving the action of the officer in command on the spot.

Meanwhile, two responsible officers were travelling with the utmost speed from the Fleet at Invergordon to London in order to lay before the Board of Admiralty a complete account of the events in

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the Fleet and a true picture of the difficulties with which the officer in command was faced.

These officers were Rear-Admiral R. M. Colvin, who was Chief-of-the-Staff to Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, but who had arrived at Invergordon on Saturday night in H.M.S. *Nelson*, and Paymaster-Captain E. P. Goldsmith, secretary to the Commander-in-Chief.

These two officers left Invergordon by air on Tuesday, September 15th, with the object of delivering their detailed reports to the Admiralty the same evening. But again Fate intervened. In the Midlands there was thick fog. The officers had already changed aeroplanes once in order to save the time which would be occupied by refuelling and in order to continue the journey in an aeroplane piloted by an officer of the Royal Air Force who knew the country over which they had to travel, when they were forced down by the fog. Further flying was out of the question under the conditions prevailing, so the Chief-of-the-Staff and the Commander-in-Chief's secretary were forced to continue their journey by train. Thus they did not reach London until so late that they did not have a full conference with the First Lord of the Admiralty and the First Sea Lord until the following day, Wednesday, September 16th.

At Invergordon mutiny still raged, although in most ships it fell far short of the popular conception

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of mutiny. The cheering continued. All the efforts of the officers to persuade the men to return to duty had failed. Yet there were only a few isolated cases in which violence to officers was threatened. When the officers went to the wardroom for dinner, privates of the Royal Marines who had been taking part all day in the mutiny were in attendance as mess waiters in their white coats and gloves. If an officer required a boat to take him to another ship, it was brought smartly alongside without delay when it was "called away."

After dinner, at 9 p.m., the usual "rounds" of the mess decks were carried out in nearly every ship by the executive officer of the ship. It is the custom of the Royal Navy for the officer going the "rounds" at 9 p.m. to visit any prisoners in the cells, and for all men whose shore leave has been stopped as a punishment for minor offences to be fallen in on the mess deck and reported to the officer going the rounds.

The "rounds" on the evening of Tuesday, September 15th, revealed that the mutineers had not attempted to declare an amnesty or to release from the cells men serving sentences for other offences. Moreover, in most of the ships at Invergordon men whose leave had been stopped were fallen in and reported present in the proper manner. As the officer of the "rounds" went from mess deck to mess deck, preceded by a bugler sounding the "Attention" on the bugle and by a member of the

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ship's police carrying a lantern, it would have been difficult in the majority of the ships to detect any signs of the great mutiny. As the "rounds" entered a mess deck the senior rating "standing the rounds" called all men on the mess deck to attention—an order which was immediately and respectfully obeyed.

This was not the case in every ship concerned in the mutiny at Invergordon, but it was so in the great majority of the ships. It offered further proof of the attitude of the mutineers—that they were concerned only in making a collective protest against the action of the Admiralty and of the Government, and desired to offer to their officers all possible respect consonant with their position and to obey all orders from officers which did not seek to break the solidarity of the "strike" and force the men to resume work in the ordinary way.

This was the keynote of the first day of the Invergordon mutiny. In the few ships in which the mutineers adopted a more hostile attitude to their officers—notably in H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*—such actions were the outcome of hooliganism on the part of the younger and wilder elements of the ships' companies, and certainly did not have the sanction of the mutineers as a whole.

Nevertheless, there was no doubt that the situation as a whole at Invergordon was deteriorating. When large numbers of normally disciplined men suddenly break the bonds of discipline and

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find themselves with nothing to do, the situation must always be dangerous. The longer matters drifted as they were doing, the greater became the risk of the mutiny assuming a more serious character, in which the mutineers might even decide to dispense with the officers and take the ships elsewhere by their own efforts, or commit any other of the manifold madresses which history has taught can be embarked upon by men suddenly released from an iron discipline. That nothing of this sort occurred must be accounted a tribute to the British character—yet the danger existed, and it grew with every hour that the men remained in mutiny and with little discipline except that of their own seeking.

Knowing and realising the justice of the grievances of the men; knowing and realising that attempt to force an issue would almost certainly precipitate a far more serious crisis; knowing that he had despatched an officer of flag rank to the Admiralty to give the Board of Admiralty—the only body with authority to remove the causes of the mutiny—a true picture of the situation; there was nothing Rear-Admiral Tomkinson—in the unenviable position of finding himself temporarily in command of the Fleet at this critical moment—could do but watch events with growing anxiety while waiting for the Admiralty to take action.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had, through the medium of Rear-Admiral Colvin, sent to the Admiralty a plea for the only action which, in his view,

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would lead to a return to discipline in the Fleet. Subsequent events proved him to be right. What he did not know, however, was that Rear-Admiral Colvin had been delayed by weather conditions. He was left wondering from hour to hour why the expected instructions did not come from the Admiralty.

After dark the cheering from ship to ship seemed to redouble in volume. In H.M.S. *Malaya* there was great anxiety. At that time there had been no indication that the ship's company intended to join in the mutiny. The officers believed the men to be loyal, yet they fully realised the strength of the influence to which they were being subjected by the constant cheering and shouting of advice and slogans from neighbouring ships.

At 10 p.m. the ship's company of H.M.S. *Malaya* was "piped down"—that is, the boatswains' pipes shrilled the order that the activities of the day were over and the men were to turn into their hammocks. There were then a large number of men on the forecastle, and there was considerable fear that they would refuse to go below to their hammocks and thus signify that the crew of H.M.S. *Malaya* had joined in the mutiny in a body. The fears proved groundless, however. The men of H.M.S. *Malaya* went below in orderly fashion in spite of loud cheering from H.M.S. *Valiant*, H.M.S. *Adventure*, and other ships, and renewed shouts of "Don't let us down, *Malaya*."

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Far into the night the noise of shouting, singing, and cheering echoed back from the hills surrounding the Firth. In some ships the men had brought on to the forecastle the piano from the recreation space or the harmonium from the chapel and held impromptu sing-songs. In others men sat about and smoked in a silence which every now and then was rent by cheers from thousands of lusty throats. There was very little sleep for officers or men in the Fleet at Invergordon that night.

One of the worst features of that night was that in certain ships the signal bridges had been seized by the mutineers, who passed signals of a subversive character from one ship to another by means of shaded signalling lamps. Worse still, in one ship a disaffected wireless rating succeeded in getting into the wireless office and making a signal by wireless calling upon all men to stand firm by the mutiny. The ship from which wireless signals emanated on the night of Tuesday, September 15th, has never been established, for no call signs were used. The mere fact of such a signal being made, however, was a tragedy. It was, naturally, not made in code, and thus it disseminated through the ether the shame of the Royal Navy in a form exaggerated by the sender and by any who might pick up the signal.

XV

INCREASING DANGER

WEDNESDAY, September 16th, 1931, was one of the most fateful days in the history of the British Empire. In Scotland a large proportion of the Royal Navy—that stable and most important bulwark of Empire—was in open mutiny. At that moment it was, as a whole, a paradox—an orderly mutiny in which officers remained officers in possession of the respect and much of the confidence of the men. The situation was, however, getting hourly worse. This was inevitable. Large numbers of men accustomed to strict discipline may break the bonds of that discipline in comparatively orderly fashion, and be determined to uphold the orderliness of their movement, but, when discipline is suddenly relaxed, new and incalculably powerful forces are given full rein. At any instant these may take charge and alter the whole character of the movement. The longer men are without discipline the greater becomes the danger.

It is a matter of history that the mutiny of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon led to the precipitate abandonment by Great Britain of the gold standard, and a sudden flight of world confidence in the basic soundness of the British Empire. Had chaos taken charge at Invergordon, through hasty action or an

unwise decision either in the Fleet or in Whitehall, confidence would have evaporated altogether. Financially, politically, and imperially, Great Britain would have been face to face with a tragedy which no power on earth could have arrested. The British Empire was on that Wednesday in very truth on the brink of final disaster.

As it was, although the repercussions of the mutiny at Invergordon were extremely serious, and have not even yet come to an end, the major calamity was averted. This was due partly to the innate common sense and loyalty of the great majority of the men concerned in the mutiny, partly to the consummate tact with which the situation was handled by the officers on the spot, and partly to the fact that a short-sighted and panic-stricken administration was on this day frightened into adopting a conciliatory policy.

In the Fleet at Invergordon on Wednesday morning such men as had turned into their hammocks turned out when it pleased them, and joined their fellow mutineers on the forecastles of the ships. Soon afterwards, at the time when men should have fallen in for work, the cheering, which had become sporadic in the small hours, again became general. Cheering was loudest and most sustained from H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*, although that from H.M.S. *Hood*, H.M.S. *Rodney*, and H.M.S. *Norfolk* was also very loud. It was obvious that this cheering represented a special effort to stiffen the

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resistance of the mutineers, it being felt in some ships that the solidarity of the mutiny might suffer at the beginning of another day.

There was little sign of this, although in some ships the persuasive tactics of the officers had already resulted in a very few men returning to duty. These, however, numbered but a dozen or so, and the total number of mutineers in the Fleet far exceeded 8,000. In H.M.S. *Rodney* there were between 800 and 900 men in mutiny. Practically the whole ships' companies of the battleships *Nelson* and *Valiant* and of the cruisers *Norfolk*, *Dorsetshire*, and *Adventure* had joined in the mutiny. H.M.S. *Hood* had several hundred mutineers; so had H.M.S. *Warspite*. H.M.S. *Exeter* was also affected. All the other ships at Invergordon were affected to some degree by the mutiny.

Least of all the ships at Invergordon, with the possible exception of H.M.S. *York*, cruiser, the morale of whose personnel had risen abruptly through the gallant action of the executive officer of that ship, was H.M.S. *Malaya* affected.

The men of H.M.S. *Malaya* had played no great part in the planning of the mutiny, and had been away from Invergordon when the fateful meeting of Monday night had been held in the canteen. There had, however, been considerable misgivings among the officers of H.M.S. *Malaya* as to the effect of the continuous cheering and appeals for support which had been hurled at their men ever

since they had rejoined the Fleet early in the previous afternoon.

The officers of H.M.S. *Malaya*, however, took every possible step to prevent the mutiny from spreading to their ship, and to keep their men, as far as possible, away from the subversive influence of the cheering and shouted appeals for support.

It had already been arranged that on the forenoon of Wednesday, September 16th, the seamen of H.M.S. *Malaya* were to wash the ship's side, and stages had already been rigged for this purpose. Naturally, the suspension of several hundred men over the side of a battleship would have led to a redoubling of the efforts of the mutineers in other ships in the vicinity to obtain the support of these men for the mutiny. The men, moreover, would have been in a position peculiarly susceptible both to ridicule and to subversive influences. For this reason the washing of the side of H.M.S. *Malaya* was cancelled. The stages were unrigged, and the men were employed almost entirely between decks, where they were out of touch with the mutiny and the attempts of the crews of other ships to gain their support.

This was a very wise move on the part of the officers of H.M.S. *Malaya*. These officers carried their wise precautions further. The daily divisions and prayers were held below, on the half deck, instead of on the upper deck, and so out of hearing of the cheers and cat-calls from other ships.

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Whenever men fell in for work in H.M.S. *Malaya*, moreover, they did so, not on the upper deck, where their appearance would have led to an immediate redoubling of the cheers from other ships, but in the privacy of the 6-inch gun batteries.

Even so, H.M.S. *Malaya* was not entirely immune from the spirit of mutiny. This, however, was confined to about fifteen men, who failed to fall in on Wednesday morning. The officers in charge of divisions immediately went down to the mess decks and sought out these men, none of whom actually refused to fall in when ordered individually to do so. Somewhat sheepishly, they gave the time-honoured excuses for not having fallen in in the first place. They had not heard the bugle or the "pipe," or they had been attending to the demands of nature. The next time the men of H.M.S. *Malaya* were ordered to fall in there were no absentees.

That was the extent of the mutiny in H.M.S. *Malaya*. In the other ships at Invergordon, however, very few men consented to fall in for work. The mutiny was as strong as ever. At 6 a.m.—the time when the hands should have fallen in for work in all the ships of the Fleet—there was no sign of life in H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure* except mutineers massed on the forecastles to cheer. In H.M.S. *Warspite* a few men fell in, but the majority remained on the forecastle. The same was true of H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Rodney*. In H.M.S. *Nelson* scarcely a man fell in when the bugles sounded the

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order. In H.M.S. *Norfolk* no men except petty officers, leading seamen, and non-commissioned officers of the Royal Marines obeyed the order to fall in. In H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* matters were little better. In H.M.S. *Exeter* more than half the ship's company refused to fall in for work.

Yet the essential services of the Fleet continued to be maintained, and when "colours" were hoisted the Royal Marine guards and bands paraded as usual in most ships and the men of the Fleet, both loyal men and mutineers, stood to attention facing aft in the traditional manner as the National Anthem was played and the ensigns were hoisted.

This seemed to argue an extraordinary inconsistency on the part of the mutineers, for all this while loyalty to the officers was being undermined. Pending further instructions, the officers had no alternative but to continue the policy of persuasion. The men, fired by twenty-four hours of licence, were tiring of these efforts, and there was grave danger of their being treated with contempt. In some ships this was actually the case, while in all the ships taking part in the mutiny a growing proportion of the men refused to muster to be addressed by the officers or to listen to what an officer had to say.

The view of the mutineers on this subject was thus expressed by one of them: "By various methods the captains of the ships tried to get us to turn to. Speeches on traditions and the prestige of the British Navy were made. Veiled reference was made to

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previous disturbances, and the ultimate punishment meted out to the ringleaders. But we were adamant. So much was at stake that we firmly refused to go to work."

The most dangerous symptom of all at this time was that there appeared to be a growing feeling of resentment among the men in certain ships when officers went among them.

Flag officers now attempted to do what the captains of the ships had failed to do. Rear-Admiral French—Rear-Admiral of the Second Battle Squadron—visited H.M.S. *Valiant*. Not only did the men refuse to muster to listen to him, but he was greeted with definite hostility by the more extreme elements. Much the same happened when Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton—Commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron—visited H.M.S. *Adventure*. It must be remembered, however, that the extreme element was much stronger in these two ships than in any other ships in the Fleet.

After his abortive visit to H.M.S. *Adventure*, Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton visited H.M.S. *Norfolk*. The order had been passed for the lower deck to be cleared and for all men to muster on the quarter deck. Only a proportion of the men obeyed this order, many remaining on the forecastle. Those men who mustered aft were prepared to listen to what their Admiral had to say. Unfortunately, the words of Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton were punctuated by cheers from other ships.

More unfortunate still was it that Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton took a strong line with the men of H.M.S. *Norfolk* and did not mince his words when addressing them. He was justifiably hurt and angry, not only because the men of his beloved Service had so far forgotten themselves as to indulge in mutiny, but also because of the treatment he had received at the hands of the men of H.M.S. *Adventure*.

Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton claimed to the men that the crew of his flag-ship, H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, had all returned to duty. This the men of H.M.S. *Norfolk* refused to believe. The Admiral is stated by Able Seaman Wincott to have "made a provocative speech and called the men 'bloody fools' and 'bloody hooligans.'" The first of these epithets was undoubtedly richly deserved by all the men taking part in the mutiny, while the latter can only be described as a polite way of referring to some of the younger men in H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*.

Able Seaman Wincott, of H.M.S. *Norfolk*, has recorded that the attempt of Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton to break the mutiny in H.M.S. *Norfolk* "failed miserably." This was true, and on leaving the ship the Admiral was subjected to derisive shouts from the men.

Such incidents as this were proof of the disquieting fact that the officers as a whole, and particularly the more senior officers, were losing their influence over the men. This was due to these

officers continuing to do their duty by attempting to support the Admiralty and to break the mutiny, and to the psychological effect produced among the men by twenty-four hours without discipline, in surroundings normally dedicated to the maintenance of the strictest discipline.

Following the visits of these flag officers to the ships in their squadrons a conference was held on board H.M.S. *Hood*. Having heard of the experiences of Rear-Admiral French and Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton in ships belonging to their own squadrons, and after discussing the situation with the captains of most of the ships, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson decided against paying a personal visit to all the ships lying at Invergordon.

In making this decision, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was influenced by two important considerations. Firstly, he was the flag officer commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron and not normally in command of the Fleet. He was, therefore, unknown to the men of nearly all the ships, who, if he visited them, might well look upon him as "just another Admiral come to try to break the mutiny," and refuse to give him a respectful hearing. Secondly, if the men refused to muster and listen, he would either have to leave the ships without accomplishing his purpose or make his way among the men and risk an incident. In either event, the officers as a whole would suffer an immediate loss of prestige, and discipline, so far from being restored, would

recede even further into the background. It must be remembered that in this difficult time Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had determined that he could best serve the Empire and the Royal Navy by doing everything in his power to avoid the spread of the mutiny, and the danger of it developing the infinitely more dangerous characteristics of a movement directed against the officers of the Fleet.

During the whole of the earlier part of Wednesday the operation of the "cheering code" was again manifestly an important factor in maintaining the spirit of mutiny in the various ships. An idea of the operation of this "cheering code" can be gained from the following extracts from a private diary kept by an officer in one of the ships at Invergordon.

7 a.m. to 7.10 a.m. Intermittent cheering in H.M.S. *Valiant*.

7.30 a.m. Cheering in H.M.S. *Valiant*, H.M.S. *Rodney*, and H.M.S. *Adventure*.

8.40 a.m. All ships cheered in succession except H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, H.M.S. *Norfolk*, and H.M.S. *Exeter*.

(It is apparent that H.M.S. *Malaya* and H.M.S. *York* did not cheer either, but this must have been overlooked at the time by the officer concerned.)

9.5 a.m. H.M.S. *Adventure* and H.M.S. *Valiant* cheered each other.

9.15 a.m. H.M.S. *Adventure* and H.M.S. *Norfolk* cheered each other.

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- 9.40 a.m. to 10 a.m. Occasional cheering between H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Rodney*.
10.15 a.m. H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Rodney* cheered each other repeatedly.
1.20 p.m. H.M.S. *Hood*, H.M.S. *Rodney*, and H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* cheered twice. H.M.S. *Exeter* cheered three times somewhat half-heartedly.

The connection between the use of this "cheering code" and the routine times at which the men of the Fleet should have fallen in for work is clearly shown when the extracts from the diary given above are compared with the following outline of normal naval routine in harbour.

- 7 a.m. Breakfast.
7.40 a.m. Hands to quarters to clean guns.
8.40 a.m. Hands fall in ; clear up decks for divisions.
9.10 a.m. Hands fall in for inspection by divisions, followed by prayers and physical drill. Immediately afterwards both watches fall in to be told off for work.
10.30 a.m. "Stand Easy" for ten minutes, after which men carry on with their work.
1.15 p.m. Both watches fall in to be told off for work for the afternoon.

In most of the ships joining in the mutiny further attempts were made by individual officers during the morning of Wednesday, September 16th, to explain the pay cuts to their men, and persuade them to put forward their grievances in the proper

manner and abandon the folly of mutiny. In nearly every case this involved the officers—usually the executive officer of the ship and the officers in charge of divisions of the ships' companies—going forward among the men either on the mess decks or on the forecastles of the ships. In one or two isolated cases these efforts met with some slight success with individual men, but on the whole they were quite without result. It was apparent in most ships that the reception accorded to the officers by the men was by no means as friendly or respectful as it had been on the previous day. Where, on Tuesday, men had shown a disinclination to listen to persuasion, on Wednesday they greeted it with thinly veiled hostility.

The well-intentioned efforts of many of these officers, in fact, did little but increase still further a danger which was in any case increasing with every hour. Particularly was this true with some of the chaplains in the Fleet. These men thought that their influence with the men might help, and, with the best of intentions, they tried to assist the officers in securing a return to discipline. A chaplain could, by nature of his calling, meet the men on their own ground on the mess decks without any question of discipline being involved, as was the case when an officer visited the mess decks or the forecastles. So conspicuous, however, was the failure of these laudable efforts that, some months later, when the whole of the evidence regarding the mutiny had

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been sifted, the Admiralty called for a report upon the influence exerted among the men by every chaplain in the Fleet.

When the officers went among the men on the Wednesday morning with the object of trying to persuade them to abandon the mutiny in favour of more orthodox means of bringing their grievances to the notice of the authorities, a most significant state of affairs was noticed in some ships—notably in H.M.S. *Norfolk*. In this ship the greater part of the ship's company was massed on the forecastle. The Royal Marines, who were "sworn men" and whose participation in the mutiny of Invergordon proved one of the greatest blows to the maintenance of discipline, were gathered right forward in the eyes of the ship. Aft them there was a solid mass of sailors and stokers, who refused to make way so that an officer could approach the Royal Marines. From this it was apparent that, in some ships at least, the Royal Marines were beginning to regret their hasty participation in the mutiny, and might have been readily persuaded to return to duty had not the seamen and stokers prevented any measures of persuasion being brought to bear upon them.

This fact was given further proof later in the day, when the mutiny was finally breaking in face of the Admiralty order for the ships to return to their home ports. The captain of H.M.S. *Norfolk* then had occasion to address some of the Royal Marines in

his ship. He spoke his mind, and reminded them that they had broken their vows and disgraced their uniform. An officer who was serving in the ship at the time stated that "they looked very crestfallen, and at least one of them was actually in tears." Immediately on the arrival of H.M.S. *Norfolk* at Devonport some days later the entire detachment of Royal Marines was marched out of the ship and replaced by a new detachment. Several of the Marines who had been concerned in the mutiny in H.M.S. *Norfolk* and in other ships were speedily removed from the Corps.

In H.M.S. *Malaya* investigations into cases in which exceptional hardship would result from the imposition of the reductions in pay were being systematically carried out by the officers in charge of divisions of the ship's company. This was the only ship lying off Invergordon in which this action could be taken. In all the other ships—even in H.M.S. *York*, in which the mutinous resistance to the imposition of the pay cuts continued to be of only a minor character—the men steadfastly refused all the efforts of their officers to secure individual cases of hardship for investigation. This was because the mutineers were suspicious that these moves on the part of the officers were taken with the object, not only of investigating cases of hardship to be forwarded to the Admiralty, but also of segregating disaffected men, discovering the ring-leaders of the mutiny, and trying to undermine the

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solidarity of the mutiny by making personal appeals to the loyalty of individual men.

The men's suspicions grew as the efforts of the officers were sustained. It must be remembered that the men had in the past few years lost confidence in the ability of the officers to right their wrongs, however good was the intention. They found it difficult to believe that the officers did not themselves realise their impotence in this direction, and this again added to the suspicion that the actions of the officers were undertaken with the ulterior motive of undermining the collective action of the men.

To some extent these suspicions were well founded. Certainly the entertainment and growth of these suspicions was steadily reducing the prestige of the officers in nearly every ship in the Fleet. Events were, in fact, slowly drifting towards the very danger which Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was rightly trying to avoid.

In some ships, and particularly in H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*, events had already come to the brink of major tragedy. In these ships numbers of young ordinary seamen who were not directly affected by the pay cuts, but who had seized the opportunity of the mutiny to throw off even the pretence of discipline, were still roaming about and behaving like mad hooligans. The fact that a whole day had passed since they had embarked upon their wild career, and that they had not in the interval

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been checked by strong action, had had the inevitable effect of encouraging them to further excesses. Insults and threats of violence to officers were multiplying with alarming speed. There were even a few cases of actual violence. It was clear that the situation in these ships was most critical, and it was continuing to deteriorate. Matters seemed to be moving inexorably towards a tragic climax which would lead to a total collapse of morale throughout the Royal Navy. Yet nothing could be done except to wait for the Admiralty to take action.

A whole day had passed since Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had despatched Rear-Admiral Colvin to the Admiralty with instructions not to mince matters in explaining the situation to the Board of Admiralty. A definite assurance of investigation and further instructions should surely have been received at Invergordon by Wednesday morning at the very latest. But still no assurance nor instructions arrived. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson knew nothing of the fact that Rear-Admiral Colvin's journey by air had been interrupted by fog, and that he had had to complete the journey by rail. Knowing nothing of these delays, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was beginning to wonder what was happening in London. Was there, at this most critical moment in the existence of the Royal Navy and of the British Empire, to be another departmental blunder such as had attended the distribution of the Admiralty

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letter about the reductions in pay? As hour succeeded hour and the situation in so many of the ships in the Fleet got steadily worse, anxiety grew and became almost unbearable.

Not least of the difficulties was that the situation demanded inaction lest worse befell. In the past six years there have been many criticisms of the conduct of the Invergordon mutiny, and many people have said that "strong action" should have been taken, but not one of these has gone so far as to lay down the course of "strong action" which should have been taken, or to prove that the taking of such action would not have added immeasurably to the danger of the situation.

The only precedents available in the history of the Royal Navy were those of the mutinies at the Nore and Spithead in 1797. In each case an attempt at "strong action" by the officers of some of the ships had led to violence being done to officers, and their incarceration in cabins under guard of the mutineers. In each case these events had led immediately to the further lowering of morale and the creation of a new situation which was far more difficult of solution. At Invergordon the problem was complicated by the fact that petty officers and leading seamen, while not taking active part in the mutiny, were undoubtedly in sympathy with the mutineers. An attempt at "strong action" against the men would almost certainly have led to the petty officers and leading seamen joining actively

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in the mutiny. The mutiny would then have at once become more universal and more serious.

The one case in which strong action against the mutineers would have been justified would have been against the hooligan elements among the young ordinary seamen and boys in some ships, notably H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*. Yet it is impossible to see how such action could have been taken without increasing the danger of the situation. Although these wilder elements did not have the sympathy of the great majority of the mutineers in the Fleet, action against them by the officers would almost inevitably have been interpreted as a "try-out" of methods of breaking the mutiny, and would consequently have been resisted by the mutineers as a whole. It would have been useless for the officers to explain the contrary to the men, for the men were already suspicious of the activities of the officers and would not have believed them.

In the circumstances there seemed to be nothing to do but wait in agonising inaction for word from the Admiralty, and hope that the word would come before tragic incidents led to a general conflagration; and that, when it did come, it would be of a character which would lead to a resumption of discipline in the sure knowledge that the legitimate grievances and claims of the men would be faithfully and fully dealt with.

XVI

THE ADMIRALTY GAMBLE

AFTER a tiring journey, during which everything seemed to be in league against the saving of time—that factor which was of such vital importance to the Fleet at Invergordon—Rear-Admiral Tomkinson's special messengers arrived at the Admiralty early on Wednesday, September 16th. They were Rear-Admiral R. M. Colvin, Chief-of-the-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, and Paymaster-Captain E. P. Goldsmith, secretary to the Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet. The Commander-in-Chief himself—Admiral Sir Michael Hodges—was still lying helpless in hospital at Haslar.

Rear-Admiral Colvin had most definite instructions from Rear-Admiral Tomkinson. He was to lay before the Board of Admiralty a full statement and appreciation of the situation which had arisen at Invergordon. He was to point out that this situation had been caused in no small degree by the failure of the Admiralty letter, explaining the reductions in pay, to arrive in the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at the proper time. He was to inform the Board of Admiralty that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, as the officer-in-command of the Fleet,

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considered that many of the men had legitimate grievances, and that he could hold out no hope of a return to discipline unless the Admiralty gave to the men of the Fleet a definite undertaking that their grievances over the pay cuts would be fully and sympathetically investigated. Moreover, he was instructed to inform the Board of Admiralty that, unless such an undertaking were immediately forthcoming, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson could not hold himself responsible for the course which the events at Invergordon might take. Finally, Rear-Admiral Colvin was to convey to the Board of Admiralty the urgent representation of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson that members of the Board of Admiralty should travel immediately to Invergordon to deal with the situation on the spot. In putting these matters before the Board of Admiralty, Rear-Admiral Colvin was not to use "diplomatic" language, but to drive home to the Board of Admiralty the immediate and grave danger of even more serious eventualities.

By asking for the presence of members of the Board of Admiralty at Invergordon to investigate the grievances of the men over the proposed reductions in pay, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was in no sense trying to shelve responsibility on to of the Board of Admiralty. The grievances of the men were concerned with the reduced rates of naval pay sponsored by the Admiralty. The Admiralty had issued the orders for the cuts in pay

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to be enforced, and only the Admiralty could alleviate the grievances of the men by rescinding or modifying the cuts.

Moreover, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was acting strictly in accordance with the only available precedent—that of the mutiny at Spithead in 1797. Action in accordance with this precedent seemed the more clearly indicated on account of the truly remarkable similarity between the mutiny of Spithead in 1797 and that of Invergordon in 1931. The striking nature of this similarity was well set out by Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes in the House of Commons on July 31st, 1934.

Having traced the events of the Invergordon mutiny up to the request of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson for the presence of the Board of Admiralty at Invergordon, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes said:

“Thus far the disaffection at Invergordon closely followed the lines of that which broke out at Spithead on 5th April, 1797. Lord Bridport had just assumed the command of the Fleet, owing to the failing health of Lord Howe, and he sent his Chief-of-Staff to the Admiralty, and, in response to his request, three members of the Board and the Secretary; in fact, the legally constituted Board of Admiralty, including the First Lord, proceeded to Portsmouth and arrived on the 18th in order, to quote from a contemporary record,

“To endeavour by their presence to restore order

amongst the seamen and to investigate their grievances.'

"I think it is fitting here to remind the House that 1797 was the year before the Battle of the Nile, and to affirm that, although it was deplorable that the men of 1931 should have been misled into following the example of their predecessors in calling attention to their grievances in such a manner, there is no more loyal body of men in His Majesty's kingdom than the men of the Royal Navy.

"The lessons of history are invaluable if people will only study them. Lord Howe had warned the Admiralty that the men had intolerable and legitimate grievances, but the Board of Admiralty had allowed matters to drift. However, they faced the situation for which they were responsible, they did not seek for victims among the officers they had let down so badly. . . .

"In these days of quick transport, it would have been quite possible for, say, the First Sea Lord, who by virtue of his office is responsible for the discipline of the Fleet, or other members of the Board, or senior officers whom the Admiralty might have delegated to represent them, to have flown to Invergordon and to have been there within a few hours. After all, the Admiralty were entirely responsible for the situation which had arisen, and they alone had the power to investigate the men's grievances. The presence of their representatives would have been just as valuable to

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Admiral Tomkinson as was that of the Board of 1797 to Lord Bridport.

"On the morning of 16th September, Admiral Tomkinson had every right to expect the support and intervention of the Board of Admiralty. The action he had taken up to date made that intervention quite possible. I think the Service agrees with me that if the Board had taken bold and proper steps on the spot, the Service would be happier than it is to-day."

On the morning of Wednesday, September 16th, Rear-Admiral Colvin and Paymaster-Captain Goldsmith had a meeting with Sir Austen Chamberlain, First Lord of the Admiralty, Admiral Sir Frederick Field, First Sea Lord, and other members of the Board of Admiralty. The two officers from Invergordon failed to convince the Board of the advisability of some of their number travelling forthwith to Invergordon to carry out on the spot, and with the full authority of the Board of Admiralty, an immediate investigation into the grievances of the men.

They did, however, succeed in impressing upon the Admiralty the danger of the situation at Invergordon, and that this danger could only be averted by a definite undertaking on the part of the Admiralty that full and sympathetic investigations would be held into the grievances of the men. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the Board of Admiralty was considerably frightened

by the picture of the situation at Invergordon given to them by Rear-Admiral Colvin.

The Board, however, continued to oppose the proposal that they, or their properly delegated representatives, should go to Invergordon and deal with the situation on the spot. Instead, a dangerous compromise was effected. The ships were to be ordered to return at once to their home ports, where investigations were to be conducted by the Commanders-in-Chief of the ports. The Admiralty was to be represented upon the Courts of Inquiry set up at the home ports.

This decision of the Admiralty evoked widespread criticism in the Royal Navy, where it was considered to be both unwise and dangerous, and a further shelving of responsibility which properly belonged to the Admiralty alone.

At Invergordon, all the ships in which mutiny had been resorted to by the men in order to call attention to their grievances were concentrated in one place, out of touch with political and other influences. At Invergordon a single inquiry would have sufficed, and there was little chance of its deliberations becoming confused by outside influences.

In the first place, to order the return of the ships from Invergordon to their home ports meant that the officer in command at Invergordon was forced to give a definite order for sailing while the men of the Fleet were in open mutiny. Even after the

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receipt of the Admiralty's promise of investigation there was considerable uncertainty in the minds of many of the officers at Invergordon as to whether the men would abandon their course of mutiny and work the ships. If such uncertainty existed among officers on the spot, it ought to have existed in even greater degree at the Admiralty.

In any event, it was the first duty of the Admiralty to guard against the issue of any orders which might make matters worse, as orders to sail would certainly have done had they been ignored, as they so nearly were, by the mutineers. It must have been obvious that, if such an order from the officer commanding the Fleet, or from the Admiralty itself, were disobeyed, the gravity of the situation would have been immeasurably increased. Even if the order to sail were obeyed and were not preceded by the general collapse of the mutiny in the face of the promise of investigation, the danger of the situation would have been increased, for a mutiny with ships steaming on the high seas must always be more dangerous than a mutiny in ships lying safely moored in harbour.

Not only would the return of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to their home ports necessitate three separate investigations, each one of which would have to be very closely co-ordinated with the other two if risks of charges of preferential treatment and further disaffection were to be avoided, but by their return to their home ports the men who were

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already so disaffected as to have indulged in mutiny would be plunged again into a vortex of seditious propaganda. Such an event could only be avoided if the men were confined to their ships and not allowed ashore during the whole period of the investigations. A step of this nature would have been possible at Invergordon, but it was clearly impossible at the home ports, where most of the men had their homes and families. Any attempt to confine men to the ships in their home ports would most certainly have led to new and even more serious disaffection.

It may be held that the risks were justified by the events, but it is difficult to concede this view. The facts seem to point rather to a reluctance in Whitehall to face or to admit the true seriousness of the position at Invergordon, or to shoulder responsibility which rightly belonged to the Admiralty as the administrative head of the Royal Navy. This, at any rate, was the opinion of the majority of naval officers. They felt that here again they had been let down, and that they were being expected, not for the first time, to remedy mistakes made in Whitehall.

After his meeting with Rear-Admiral Colvin, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the First Lord of the Admiralty, having consulted with his colleagues in the Cabinet, prepared a statement and then went to the House of Commons. On this Wednesday the Speaker took the Chair in the House of Commons

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in an atmosphere of angry but puzzled expectancy. Members had seen in their morning newspapers the statements of the Admiralty, the one acknowledging that "unrest" at Invergordon had led the naval officer in command to order a suspension of the exercise programme of the Atlantic Fleet, and the other approving this action.

Beyond the meagre news contained in these statements, Members of Parliament knew nothing. Some were instinctively angry with the men of the Royal Navy for "letting the country down" at a time when all sections were being called upon cheerfully to offer sacrifices on the altar of financial stability. Others, with a greater knowledge of, and respect for, the British sailor, realised that something had gone seriously amiss. They were frankly puzzled. All, however, were expectant of an official statement from the First Lord of the Admiralty which would clarify the situation.

After formal delay in which Ministers answered questions relative to subjects of little interest to the House of Commons as a whole, the Admiralty statement was made by Sir Austen Chamberlain in response to a question "by private notice." It ran as follows:

"The Board of Admiralty have had under their earnest consideration the representations received from the Officer Commanding the Atlantic Fleet as to the hardships involved in certain classes of cases by the reductions ordered by His Majesty's

Government in naval rates of pay. Their Lordships have directed the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to proceed to their home ports forthwith. Personal investigation will then be made by the Commanders-in-Chief and representatives of the Admiralty into those classes of cases in which it is alleged that the reductions press exceptionally on those concerned. His Majesty's Government have authorised the Board of Admiralty to make proposals for alleviating the hardship in these classes as soon as the facts have been ascertained by the contemplated investigation."

Viewed from the distance of time, and with the knowledge of the basic causes of the mutiny in the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon—mutiny which all authorities, both official and unofficial, persisted in not recognising as such, but in referring to as "unrest" or by some similar equivocal term—this statement by the First Lord of the Admiralty appears as a triumph of statesmanship in face of most difficult circumstances.

The statement referred to the "reductions ordered by His Majesty's Government in naval rates of pay." Technically this was a statement of fact, yet it very cleverly laid the whole blame for the events at Invergordon at the door of the Cabinet Room, irrespective of the fact that the grievances of the mutineers were concerned with the terms of a Fleet Order issued by the Admiralty. Naturally, such a Fleet Order was only passing on to the men of the

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Royal Navy the edicts of the Government, but the form of its promulgation was sufficient proof of its passage through the Board of Admiralty—a body which should, by virtue of its office, have been able to gauge its effect upon the men of the Navy and its reception in the Fleet.

A Board of Admiralty can always be overridden by a Government, but the Board has its remedy and method of showing its disapproval of Government orders—the method of threatening wholesale resignation, which must always have a profound influence upon a Government, particularly if it is concerned with any question of the welfare of the personnel.

One other thing is apparent when one looks back upon this and other statements made officially about the mutiny at Invergordon. No mention was made of the delay in the receipt by the ships of the Fleet of the Admiralty letter explaining the reductions in pay. On this matter spokesmen of the Admiralty remained silent. They must have experienced a moment of uneasiness on this same Wednesday afternoon when the Secretary of State for War enumerated in the House of Commons the precautions which had been taken by his Department to ensure that every man in the Army was given full and detailed explanation of the proposed reductions in pay. The War Office communication to the men of the Army, however, began with the tell-tale words, "Misconceptions having arisen."

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The introduction of the pay cuts had not gone altogether smoothly in the Army.

At no time did the Admiralty allude to the hitch in the distribution of their official letter of explanation. In fact, the letter itself was never mentioned, either at the time or afterwards, until it was alluded to by Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes nearly three years later.

Shortly before this statement was made in the House of Commons by Sir Austen Chamberlain, another statement bearing upon the Invergordon mutiny had been made. Major Elliot announced that the total savings which would be made in the estimates for the fighting Services in 1932 by the economy measures would be:

Royal Navy	£3,942,000
Army	£3,693,000
Royal Air Force	£ 954,000
	<hr/>
Total	£8,589,000

He further announced that, of this sum, the savings on pay and pensions in 1932 would amount to:

Royal Navy	£1,612,000
Army	£1,960,000
Royal Air Force	£ 194,000

Here was ironical anti-climax to the well-nigh incredible news of mutiny in the Royal Navy arising

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out of the pay cuts. The prestige, morale, and discipline of the greatest defence Service in the world was being thrown to the winds in order to secure for the Treasury a saving in a year of little more than one and a half million pounds. Moreover, the report of the May Economy Committee upon which these reductions in pay had been framed had stated that £120,000,000 had to be made good, and the Government's Economy Bill presented to Parliament on September 9th had stated that Orders in Council were to be issued which would effect an estimated economy of £70,000,000 in the national expenditure.

With the knowledge of the small percentage of the necessary saving to be effected by the cuts in the pay of the fighting Services, and with a growing realisation of the gravity of mutiny in the Royal Navy, a number of supplementary questions were asked in the House of Commons.

One of these sought to establish whether the Cabinet had in fact approved the imposition of the cuts in naval pay. In his reply to this question, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, said that "even when temporary consideration was being given to the blocks of cuts, it was clearly understood that each Department, when it produced the saving, could adjust internally the burden of the saving itself. That was a general rule laid down and applicable to all Departments."

Thus did the Prime Minister pass back on to the

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Admiralty the responsibility for the form of the pay cuts to be imposed upon the men of the Royal Navy.

Thereupon Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy asked a most trenchant question: "May I ask the First Lord of the Admiralty why it is that their investigations are being made now, and why the men's conditions were not inquired into by himself, on his own responsibility, before these cuts were announced?" To this Sir Austen Chamberlain replied: "The honourable and gallant Member knows that this Government succeeded to a situation in which rapid action is essential." At this he was interrupted by the interjection, "You have got it," from a Member, but he continued: "and the only information which I could make available when they were considering this matter was the information which had already been made available for my predecessor."

One cannot help feeling sorry for Sir Austen Chamberlain. He had taken office in a Government committed to rapid steps in the direction of national economy. He had had no time or opportunity personally to study the proposals for reducing the pay of the Royal Navy or the conditions of life and problems of the sailors. In the circumstances he could only accept information given to him by his advisers at the Admiralty. He was not to know that this information was the outcome of six years of unceasing agitation on the part of the Treasury. His

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phrase "the information which had already been made available for my predecessor" was eloquent. He referred to the dossier on recommended reductions in naval pay which had started with the report of the Anderson Committee nearly seven years before, and which had been presented hopefully to every First Lord of the Admiralty who had assumed office since Lord Beatty had left the Admiralty.

From the very nature of the words of Sir Austen Chamberlain it is obvious that the blame really lay with some of the permanent civilian officials at the Admiralty who were preoccupied with the demands of the Treasury, and who had no knowledge of the conditions of life of the men of the Royal Navy, and with the naval members of the Board of Admiralty who were sufficiently out of touch with the men of the Fleet to imagine that such reductions would be acceptable.

That afternoon an order following upon the general lines of the statement of Sir Austen Chamberlain was sent to the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon. This order was as follows:

"The Board of Admiralty is fully alive to the fact that amongst certain classes of ratings special hardship will result from the reduction in pay ordered by His Majesty's Government. It is their direction that ships of the Atlantic Fleet are to proceed to their Home Ports forthwith to enable personal investigation to be made by the

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Commanders-in-Chief and representatives of the Admiralty with a view to necessary alleviation being made. Any further refusals of individuals to carry out orders will be dealt with under the Naval Discipline Act. This order is to be promulgated to the Fleet forthwith."

This order was read out in the House of Commons by Sir Austen Chamberlain on the following afternoon, and was followed by a wrangle between him and Mr. Alexander, the ex-First Lord of the Admiralty, over the responsibility for instituting the pay cuts. After reading the order, Sir Austen Chamberlain announced that "In accordance with this Order, the Fleet sailed yesterday." The Admiralty's gamble had succeeded, but nobody was told of the narrowness of the margin of success.

Although the order sent to the Fleet at Invergordon by the Admiralty followed the general lines of the statement of Sir Austen Chamberlain in the House of Commons after his meeting with Rear-Admiral Colvin, and subsequent discussion with his colleagues in the Cabinet, there were three important differences.

Whereas, according to the statement made in the House of Commons on Wednesday afternoon, the Board of Admiralty had had "under their earnest consideration" the representations of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson about the grievances among the men over undue hardship which would fall upon certain classes of ratings under the proposed cuts in pay,

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the Admiralty order to the Fleet stated that the Board of Admiralty was "fully alive to the fact that" the pay cuts would cause special hardships.

The difference in this phrasing represents the difference between the requirements of Parliament and of the Fleet. Had the First Lord of the Admiralty told the House of Commons on Wednesday afternoon that the Board of Admiralty was "fully alive" to the fact that the proposed cuts in pay would impose special hardships upon certain classes of men in the Royal Navy, and, by inference, admitted that the Board realised that the principle of equal sacrifice was not maintained by the proposed reductions, criticism which had been largely confined to a trenchant question by Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy would almost certainly have become a storm. On the other hand, Rear-Admiral Colvin had, on the instructions of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, made it abundantly clear to the Board of Admiralty that there was no chance of a return to discipline in the Fleet at Invergordon, and every chance of the situation suffering rapid deterioration, if the Admiralty, in dealing with the men of the Fleet, confined itself to vague phrases and failed to make concrete proposals.

It was for this reason, also, that the Admiralty order to the Fleet at Invergordon went so far as to say that the investigations at the home ports were to be held "with a view to necessary alleviation being made." Here was a definite promise that the

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reductions in pay were to be revised in cases where the inquiries showed that they imposed special hardship on the men. In the Parliamentary statement the onus for making any alleviations was laid upon the Government, who had "authorised the Board of Admiralty to make proposals" for alleviating hardship where this was clearly shown to exist by the findings of the inquiries at the home ports.

Most important of all was the penultimate sentence of the Admiralty order to the Fleet at Invergordon. "Any further refusals of individuals to carry out orders will be dealt with under the Naval Discipline Act." This was tantamount to declaring an amnesty for all the men concerned in the mutiny before the receipt of this Admiralty order. There had been no hint of such an amnesty in Parliament. Had there been, it is probable that the proposal would have met with opposition. So far as the Fleet was concerned, however, it was a wise and very necessary provision in the Admiralty order.

The men of the ships at Invergordon had already committed themselves to mutiny—a very serious offence under the Naval Discipline Act, and one which, even if not accompanied by violence, carries very heavy punishment, the maximum being death. Had there been no mention of an amnesty in the Admiralty order to the Fleet, it is probable that the men would have felt bound for their own protection to continue with the mutiny until such an amnesty was declared.

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Although the vast majority of the men in the Fleet had embarked upon the course of "collective strike action" without realising that this was nothing more or less than mutiny dressed up in a more acceptable phrase, by Wednesday, September 16th, the repeated statements and warnings of their officers had left them under no illusions as to the gravity of their offence, and the seriousness of their position under the Naval Discipline Act.

XVII

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THE Admiralty order promising investigation of the grievances of the men of the Atlantic Fleet, the adjustment of the pay cuts where the investigations proved undue hardship, the amnesty for the mutineers, and directing the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to leave Invergordon for their home ports, was received by Rear-Admiral Tomkinson on board H.M.S. *Hood* soon after 4 p.m. on Wednesday, September 16th.

In accordance with the last sentence of the order, which stated that it was "to be promulgated to the Fleet forthwith," the order was immediately passed by signal to every ship at Invergordon. Its reception was decidedly mixed, and it immediately became clear that the question of whether or not the order to sail would be obeyed hung in the balance.

In H.M.S. *Hood*, H.M.S. *Nelson*, H.M.S. *Valiant*, and H.M.S. *Adventure*, loud cheering broke out as soon as the purport of the signal became known to the men. This might have been taken as a sign of jubilation at a victory over the Admiralty, which had promised both redress and amnesty. On the other hand, the operation of the "cheering code" throughout the mutiny led to the belief that it

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demonstrated a desire on the part of the crews of these ships to stimulate the solidarity of the mutiny even in face of what appeared a surrender on the part of the Admiralty.

This interpretation of the cheering was confirmed by subsequent events. At 5 p.m. Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton ordered the lower deck to be cleared in his flag-ship, H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, and the men to muster aft in order that he might read to them the Admiralty signal. Seeing that the men in H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* were mustering on the quarter-deck in order to be addressed by an officer, the ship's company of H.M.S. *Hood* broke into loud cheering. At the same time a number of men on the forecastle of H.M.S. *Norfolk* greeted the movement on board H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* with shouts of "No! No! No!" This shout was taken up by the men of H.M.S. *Hood*.

In H.M.S. *Rodney*, however, which had played such an important part in the institution of the mutiny, the signal to sail for home ports was received in quite a different manner. The commanding officer of H.M.S. *Rodney* also gave orders for the lower deck to be cleared and for all men to muster at the after end of the forecastle. The men obeyed. In the words of one of the men of H.M.S. *Rodney*, who had taken part in the mutiny, "We assembled at the request of the captain and he addressed us from the turret. He told us that the Admiralty had promised to consider cases of hardship and himself

assured us that he would do his best for us. He told us that we were to return to home ports for that purpose."

The Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Rodney*, having told the men of his ship of the Admiralty order, did not try to rush them into hasty action. He told them that he proposed to dismiss them and give them a quarter of an hour in which to decide on their course of action before sounding the bugle for both watches to fall in to prepare the ship for sea.

In doing so the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Rodney* was undoubtedly taking a risk, for in that quarter of an hour the words of one or two agitators might have swayed the men towards a continuance of the mutiny. The Commanding Officer, however, had faith in his men, and he knew that the persuasive efforts of his officers had already led to some weakening of the spirit of mutiny in H.M.S. *Rodney*.

To give the men a quarter of an hour to think things over was a wise move, for it made the men feel that they still retained the initiative. There was virtually no more trouble in H.M.S. *Rodney*. Actually, one man out of the whole ship's company of nearly 1,300 refused duty when the bugles sounded a quarter of an hour later. He was immediately and faithfully dealt with by the Commanding Officer, who sentenced him to the cells for fourteen days—the maximum punishment which can be inflicted by a captain in the Royal Navy without

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recourse to a warrant requiring the sanction and approval of the Commander-in-Chief. Punishment by warrant would, therefore, have involved undesirable delay.

In the handling of the situation on board H.M.S. *Rodney* on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 16th, there is no doubt that the personality and popularity of the Commanding Officer played an important part. The men of H.M.S. *Rodney*, both mutineers and those who had not taken part in the mutiny, said of him: "He is the finest officer in the Fleet. We owe much to him and to the consideration he showed us." This officer was wise and conciliatory at a time when any other action might well have been fatal, yet, having once got the situation in hand, he wasted no mercy on the individual who continued to refuse duty. He was, however, to be one of the many officers whose naval careers were terminated as a result of the events at Invergordon.

In some of the other ships the reception of the Admiralty order to sail for home ports was not so happy. The divergence in the reception of this order among various ships' companies who up to that time had shown a remarkable unanimity of aim and action must be attributed to the fact that here, for the first time since the outbreak of the mutiny, was a question for which the organisation did not provide. The men in the various ships had to decide for themselves, for there was no means whereby they could consult with their fellows in other ships. Even

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the operation of the cheering code broke down, for nobody quite knew whether cheers were in celebration of victory or in an attempt to induce other ships to continue the mutiny. In the circumstances, the men of some ships were averse to taking further mutinous action in the fear that they might discover that they were acting alone.

Some of the ships whose crews had been most conspicuous during the mutiny sailed from Invergordon in accordance with the Admiralty order without any serious trouble or misgivings being given to their officers. In H.M.S. *Valiant* and H.M.S. *Adventure*—two ships in which the mutiny had been of a far more serious nature than in the majority of the ships—the Admiralty order to sail led to an immediate movement in the direction of a return to discipline. The officers in these ships certainly experienced difficulties, but they overcame them by their courageous attitude at the crucial moment. The mutiny in these ships was already virtually at an end.

The flag officers in command of squadrons of ships at Invergordon allowed a pause to elapse after the receipt of the Admiralty order in all ships under their command. They then called for reports from the Commanding Officers of ships in their squadrons upon the reception of the Admiralty order and the advisability or otherwise of immediately making the executive signal for the ships to sail for home ports.

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Among the battle cruisers and most of the battleships there was little trouble, and the Commanding Officers were able to report that they felt confident that their men would take the ships to sea. The one outstanding exception among the heavy ships was H.M.S. *Nelson*, normally the flag-ship of the Atlantic Fleet. The crew of H.M.S. *Nelson* attempted to continue the mutiny by their own action, and only abandoned their attitude when it was clear that they had no support from the rest of the Fleet.

In the Second Cruiser Squadron, however, matters were not quite so easy, in spite of the fact that the men of H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*—the flagship of the squadron—had shown themselves amenable to reason. A little more than half an hour after the Admiralty order had been received in all ships, Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, commanding the Second Cruiser Squadron, summoned the Commanding Officers of the ships under his command to report upon the reception of the Admiralty signal and the chances of getting the ships to sea without further trouble.

In response to this request, the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Norfolk* was forced to admit that he was still in some doubt as to whether the men of H.M.S. *Norfolk* would take the ship to sea in accordance with the Admiralty signal if they were ordered to do so. He added that he did not consider that any such doubt should delay the sailing of the squadron, and that, if the necessity arose, he was

prepared to try to take his ship to sea with only the assistance of the officers, petty officers, and leading seamen.

Happily, the necessity for such action did not arise, although for some time the decision between mutiny of a more serious character and a return to discipline hung in the balance. In spite of further attempts at persuasion by the officers, who explained to the men that the orders to sail were earnest of the Admiralty's desire to set matters right with regard to the cuts in pay, and who made it clear that this was the last chance of returning to duty without incurring the full penalties prescribed for mutiny by the Naval Discipline Act, the men showed no signs of abandoning the mutiny and the stokers refused to go below to raise steam.

What followed in H.M.S. *Norfolk* was similar to the action taken by officers in several other ships—action in which the officers showed themselves possessed of great moral courage in face of mass opposition.

In H.M.S. *Norfolk* the order was passed for the lower deck to be cleared and for the entire ship's company to muster on the quarterdeck in order to be addressed by the Commanding Officer. The order was very generally disobeyed, only about half the seamen and few of the stokers "laying aft." The majority of the ship's company remained massed on the forecastle. To the men who mustered aft the Commanding Officer read the Admiralty

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signal stating that investigations were to be conducted at the home ports with a view to alleviation being made in the pay reductions, and ordering the ships to sail for home ports in order that such investigations might be made by the local Commanders-in-Chief. The warning that any further refusal of duty would be dealt with under the Naval Discipline Act was also made clear.

This statement, however, was made only to those men who mustered on the quarterdeck in response to the order. To confine the statement and the warning to this proportion of the ship's company would obviously have proved useless. To allow these men to rejoin their fellows who remained in a state of mutiny on the forecastle would probably have undone any good impression which might have been made upon the men who had listened to their Commanding Officer. Herein lay a situation of no little difficulty. The Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Norfolk*, however, handled it with skill and promptitude.

All the men who had mustered on the quarterdeck of H.M.S. *Norfolk* were kept there by the officers in charge of divisions of the men, who made further and more detailed explanations to groups of men. These were thus detained in the after part of the ship while the Commanding Officer, accompanied by the executive officer, the navigating officer, and the gunnery officer, went forward to the forecastle.

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They found the remainder of the ship's company massed right forward in the eyes of the ship. As soon as these men saw the officers coming they turned their backs upon them. Once again the men showed that they were afraid of coming into close contact with their officers. The three officers, however, advanced to the edge of the crowd of men, and some of the men turned instinctively to listen when their Commanding Officer began to address them. This action was immediately resented by the men further forward, and there were shouts of "No." The Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Norfolk* then took the nearest man by the shoulder, and addressing him by name, asked him whether he would return to work and assist in taking the ship to sea. For an instant the course of history hung in the balance. Then training and the personality of the officer triumphed. "Yes, sir," replied the sailor.

From that moment the fate of the mutiny in H.M.S. *Norfolk* was sealed, as it was already being sealed in every ship in the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon—except H.M.S. *Nelson*.

Other men were called upon by name. At first there was a little hesitation. Then the men answered promptly, coming to attention and saluting as they were individually addressed. The tendency among the men further forward, to turn their backs to their officers in a solid wall of blue serge, wavered. Then it broke altogether. The men turned and listened

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to their officers, who were now able to move among them and address the men individually, instead of being able to accost only the men on the fringe of the crowd. Soon the mutineers began to leave the foremost part of the forecastle quicker than they could be called upon individually by name, and with them went the men who had been the ring-leaders of the mutiny.

Immediately, before there could be any second thoughts on the part of the men, the bugle sounded the order for both watches to fall in for work. The men did not fall in spontaneously or with the usual smartness, but they did fall in. The mutiny in H.M.S. *Norfolk* had ended.

The officers, however, were taking precautions to ensure that the return to duty should be universal, and that no discontented nucleus of mutiny remained. While the Commanding Officer made his way slowly aft along the upper deck, pausing several times to address little groups of men who were showing hesitation in obeying the order to fall in, other officers went below to the mess decks to keep up the pressure on the men and make sure that no mutinous groups re-formed out of sight of the officers.

The process was somewhat slow, but it was completely successful. Men who had been in open mutiny for two days fell in for work and set about the task of preparing the ship for sea. By 9.30 that evening, when H.M.S. *Norfolk* sailed with her

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squadron, there was not a man on board who had not returned to duty.

In H.M.S. *Nelson*, however, similar tactics on the part of the officers were being met with such determined opposition by the mutineers that they had to be abandoned for fear that their continuance might lead to the development of a more dangerous situation. As in the other ships, the mutineers in H.M.S. *Nelson* massed on the forecastle. They refused to muster further aft in order to be addressed by their Commanding Officer—or to listen when an attempt was made to read out to them the Admiralty order promising investigation, alleviation, and ordering a return of the ships to their home ports. An attempt was then made by the officers to address the men individually. The men turned their backs on their officers and there were shouts of “No! No!” In H.M.S. *Nelson*, however, it was at once obvious that the temper of the men was such that any more definite action on the part of the officers might well lead to a deplorable incident.

In the circumstances there was no alternative for the Commanding Officer but to report to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson that the men of H.M.S. *Nelson* remained in mutiny and were likely to resist any effort on the part of the officers and petty officers to take the ship to sea.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson then had to make a most difficult decision. Should he report to the Admiralty that H.M.S. *Nelson* remained in mutiny

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and that he would not be able to comply with the Admiralty order for all ships to proceed at once to their home ports, and thus lay the onus for the next step upon the Admiralty? Should he upon his own responsibility cancel the sailing of the other ships of the Fleet until the mutineers in H.M.S. *Nelson* consented to return to duty? Should he sail with the rest of the Fleet in accordance with the Admiralty order and leave the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Nelson* to deal as best he could with the continuance of the mutiny in his ship?

To report to the Admiralty would almost certainly have led to delay, which might well have proved disastrous to the other ships. To cancel the sailing of the rest of the Fleet and remain at Invergordon with H.M.S. *Nelson* would have entailed overriding a definite order from the Admiralty. Moreover, it would almost certainly have led to a spread of the spirit of the men of H.M.S. *Nelson* to those of the other ships, and thus a reversion to the general mutiny of the last few days, if not, indeed, the development of an even more serious situation. To sail with the remainder of the Fleet and, if necessary, leave H.M.S. *Nelson* behind might lead to the development of a graver type of mutiny in that one ship. It would, however, be confined to the one ship, and there was at least a possibility that the crew of H.M.S. *Nelson* might abandon their stand for continuing the mutiny if it was demonstrated to them by the sailing of the remainder of

the Fleet that they were left alone, and that their action did not have the support of their fellows in the other ships.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson decided upon the latter course, and it had the effect of breaking the mutiny in H.M.S. *Nelson*. For a time, however, it was touch and go, and the men of H.M.S. *Nelson* did not return to duty and get the ship under way until they had made every effort to obtain the support of the crews of other ships for a continuance of the mutiny.

The order to sail was given, accompanied by details of the order in which ships were to leave harbour and of the formations to be taken up by the Fleet when clear of the Firth. The cruisers were to sail first, followed by the heavy ships. By 9.30 p.m. all the cruisers had unmoored and were lying at single anchor, ready to be led to sea by the cruiser flag-ship, H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*.

Then Fate once again attempted to tilt the scales in favour of chaos. For a ship of the Royal Navy to get a foul anchor is something of a rarity, yet at this moment H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* found that she had a foul anchor, and was unable to weigh and proceed to sea until it had been cleared.

It is difficult to over-estimate the danger of that moment. The mutiny had flared up on Tuesday morning because of the failure of a ship to go to sea at the time appointed in the orders. On Wednesday night men had returned to duty, but discipline was

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precarious and the atmosphere of mutiny still pervaded the Fleet. In many ships the men had only been prevailed upon to return to duty when they had become fully convinced that the crews of the other ships were also abandoning the mutiny. The crews of the various ships were separated by the space between the ships, and only the men in the ships closest to H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* could see with their own eyes the men on the forecastle of that ship striving to clear a foul anchor. To the other ships only one thing was clear—that a ship was failing to sail at the time laid down in the orders. That this was not taken as a repetition of the signal of Tuesday morning for the outbreak of general mutiny, and that it did not lead to the immediate resumption of the mutiny among all the ships in the Fleet is a tribute to the desire for moderation among the great majority of the men, and to the grip which the officers had been able to get on the situation in the few hours which had elapsed since the arrival of the Admiralty order and the persuasion of the first men to return to duty.

At last H.M.S. *Dorsetshire's* anchor was cleared and she proceeded down the Firth to the North Sea. The last of the ships still at anchor which had to be passed before reaching the entrance to the Firth was H.M.S. *Nelson*. This great battleship which, as flag-ship of the Commander-in-Chief, was usually in the proud position of leading the Fleet in all things, was the only ship of the Atlantic Fleet

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remaining in a state of open mutiny. She represented an extraordinary sight as the ships passed her on their way to the open sea.

It was by then almost dark. The forecastle of H.M.S. *Nelson*, however, stood out clearly, for it was floodlit by "yard arm groups." On that long forecastle were massed more than 1,000 men—almost the entire ship's company of H.M.S. *Nelson*. As each ship passed the great battleship a storm of terrific cheering broke out from the men on the floodlit forecastle, and the cheering was interspersed with the frequent singing of the "Red Flag." It was the last desperate attempt on the part of mutineers in H.M.S. *Nelson* to secure the support of the rest of the Fleet for a continuance of the mutiny. As the ships passed the bows of H.M.S. *Nelson* they could see that the mutineers had passed a thick wire hawser through the links of the great anchor cables to frustrate any attempt on the part of the officers to take the ship to sea, either by unmooring or by slipping the cables.

The ships passed H.M.S. *Nelson* in silence. From none of them came a single cheer of approval or encouragement. Thus H.M.S. *Nelson*, the proud flag-ship, was ignominiously shunned and ignored by the ships whose duty it was in normal times to "follow the motions of the flag-ship."

The gamble had succeeded. Not only did the continued disaffection in H.M.S. *Nelson* fail to contaminate once again the returning discipline in

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the other ships, but the crew of H.M.S. *Nelson*, finding that they were indeed being left alone in Cromarty Firth while the remainder of the Fleet returned to the joys of their home ports and the promise of inquiry and alleviation of hardships, abruptly changed their attitude and returned to duty. The ship was unmoored, the anchors weighed, and the *Nelson* followed her consorts out into the North Sea night.

Throughout the Fleet discipline had returned in a remarkable degree during the few hours which had elapsed since the receipt of the Admiralty order. The state of affairs in the Fleet, however, was still far from the orderly and strictly disciplined routine of the Royal Navy of normal times. The officers were well aware that any attempt at an immediate re-establishment of normal routine would be liable to resuscitate the diminishing disaffection. For that reason it was wisely decided that during the passage south to home ports no exercises would be carried out, and a minimum of work would be imposed upon the men consistent with the need for continual demonstration of the fact that the mutiny was a thing of the past.

The difficult task of the officers was, however, made easier so soon as the Fleet was at sea. No sooner had the ships passed between the Sutors at the entrance to the Firth and begun to lift to the oily swell of the open sea than there was an immediate subconscious return to the seagoing tradition

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of discipline. Nevertheless, a great deal of the soviet atmosphere continued to exist. Men gathered in groups, and discussed and re-discussed the terms of the Admiralty order and the best manner in which to put forward to the coming investigations their representations of hardships caused by the proposed pay cuts. Officers were uneasy, knowing that the situation remained delicate and that the newly established form of discipline was an unnatural structure balanced upon very precarious foundations.

The first night at sea passed in mutual anxiety and uneasiness on the part of the officers and men. Thursday, September 17th, was a day of very little routine work beyond the essential tasks of keeping watches and keeping the ships clean. The latter was a task which had been carried out throughout the two days of open mutiny. In the afternoon the men were granted a "make and mend"—the naval equivalent of a half holiday, so called because it is traditionally the opportunity for the sailor to make or mend his clothes.

There was, however, much activity upon this Thursday at sea. In every ship in the Fleet officers were busy persuading the men to lay before them statements of their individual and family finances, and how these would be affected if the proposed cuts in pay were to come into force. In this task great care was taken by the officers to avoid any action which might have been thought by the men to be

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an attempt at segregation or discovery of the ringleaders of the mutiny. Not that such action was in any way necessary. Most of the ringleaders were already known to the officers by observation during the mutiny itself, and it was quite evident that none of the men would give definite evidence against these ringleaders in spite of the implied promise of amnesty contained in the Admiralty Order. Paradoxically, the men who were ringleaders in the mutiny at Invergordon were mostly good seamen with an innate quality of leadership—the very men who would be likely to prove most valuable in an emergency.

On the morning of Friday, September 18th, the Fleet was off the Thames estuary. It was calm, and the ships were stopped so that the reports of all ships on the mutiny and the grievances of the men could be transferred by boat to the squadron flagships. These reports all acknowledged that the men of the Fleet had very real and serious grievances about the proposed introduction of the new scales of pay. So clearly had the grievances of the men been understood by their officers that in one ship at Invergordon there had actually been a movement among the officers to petition the Admiralty to impose if necessary further reductions upon the officers so that the hardships of the men might be alleviated. This was an amazing example of the thoughtfulness of naval officers for the welfare of their men, particularly as the officers

themselves were already to suffer serious reductions.

Ships belonging to Chatham then parted from the main body of the Fleet, which steamed on through the Straits of Dover into the English Channel to head for Portsmouth and Devonport.

On Friday, before reaching their home ports, the Commanding Officers of many of the ships once again addressed the men of their ships' companies. In every case their remarks about the mutiny at Invergordon reflected deep and bitter disappointment at the manner in which the great traditions of the Royal Navy had been sullied by the action of the mutineers. This bitterness exists to-day among the great majority of naval officers and among a large section of the British public. It will continue to do so until it is universally recognised that, although mutiny is always indefensible, Invergordon was the outcome of maladministration, and of events which, in the absence of explanation, the men could not be expected to understand.

The fact that the lessons of Invergordon have been largely learnt, and steps have been taken, not only to root out from the Royal Navy disaffected "cells" energised by political influences, but to guard against foolish mistakes in administration, must at once elevate the events at Invergordon out of the category of black tragedy in which it is so often regarded.

XVIII

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WHEN the ships of the Atlantic Fleet arrived at their home ports after the mutiny at Invergordon they received a very half-hearted welcome. This was due partly to the fact that the true implications of the proposed reductions in naval pay were not generally understood outside the Royal Navy, and laymen were consequently prone to think that the men of the Royal Navy had indulged in mutiny as a protest merely against bearing their rightful share of sacrifices being cheerfully borne throughout the country in the interests of national stability.

Normally, when ships return to their home ports crowds gather at vantage points to watch the ships enter harbour and to welcome the men home. The departure in September 1931 from this tradition cannot have been due entirely to resentment at the protest made by the men of the Fleet against the proposed reductions in pay. Among the crowds which usually gather to welcome a ship returning to its home port, the wives and relatives of the men predominate.

Before the Fleet had sailed the men had discussed with their families the possibilities of pay cuts, and had worked out with their wives the effect which various cuts would have upon their family budgets.

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Thus, when the proposed reductions were announced, the wives of the men realised that their severity spelt ruin to many homes. Yet these women, by not gathering to welcome the ships, showed their disapproval of the action taken at Invergordon. This attitude was not due to loyalty on the part of these women to the letter of the Naval Discipline Act or hatred of collective action as a weapon of protest. Rather was it due to a realisation of the strictness of discipline in the Royal Navy in normal times, and a feeling that the men had, in protesting against the cuts in pay, laid themselves open to severe punishments and dismissal from the Royal Navy, which, with the rising tide of unemployment, would have upon their families an even more disastrous effect than the proposed reductions in naval pay. It is probable, also, that the womenfolk resented the inference, drawn from the manifesto of the mutineers, that they would be easily led by hardship into vice and prostitution.

Whatever the cause, the cool welcome of the men at their home ports had a distinctly sobering effect. This factor was unconsciously exploited by the naval authorities when, on the arrival of the ships, they decided that week-end leave was to be given to the watch ashore as if nothing untoward had happened.

This was not done without some misgiving. It was clearly realised that to withhold week-end leave in the home ports would have been so tantalising

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as to subject the men to yet another well-nigh unbearable grievance. Particularly was there mis-giving in H.M.S. *Malaya*. The men of this ship had remained loyal throughout the mutiny at Invergordon in spite of all the appeals shouted by the mutineers in other ships. The officers of H.M.S. *Malaya* were well aware that feeling against the crew of H.M.S. *Malaya* was running high among the men of other ships because of their refusal to give their support to the mutiny.

So great was the fear that reprisals might be taken by the men of other ships, which might lead to serious riots ashore, that the advisability of providing all the men of H.M.S. *Malaya* going ashore with cap ribbons bearing the name of H.M.S. *Vivid*, the manning depot, was seriously considered. Finally a decision was taken against this step, as it would have tended to rob the loyal men of H.M.S. *Malaya* of pride in their loyalty and in their ship, but every man going ashore from H.M.S. *Malaya* was specifically warned against becoming entangled in any argument or brawl. Actually, the fears of the officers on this occasion proved groundless, largely because the mutineers from the other ships were considerably chastened as a result of the coolness of their welcome home. There were one or two isolated cases of men from H.M.S. *Malaya* being jeered at by other men, but in no case did this lead to trouble of any gravity.

The Admiralty had been busy during the passage

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south of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet. The question of the hardship imposed upon the men by the introduction of the new scales of pay had also been brought up once again in Parliament, and Sir Austen Chamberlain, First Lord of the Admiralty, had been given opportunity to make a further and even more conciliatory statement.

On the afternoon of Thursday—the day after the ships of the Atlantic Fleet had safely left Invergordon for their home ports—Sir Austen Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons:

“Where there are cases of exceptional hardship we shall look into them in order to find a remedy. That is the object of the inquiry which shall be held at the earliest possible moment when the ships have arrived at their Home Ports.

“We shall impress on the respective Commanders-in-Chief that the inquiry shall be concluded with the greatest expedition possible in order that a decision of the Government may be come to at the earliest possible moment.

“But care will be taken that an opportunity will be given for all concerned to make their representations so as to elucidate the facts necessary for a reasonable judgment.”

In the course of the same speech in the House of Commons on September 17th, Sir Austen Chamberlain gave to Parliament an earnest of the Admiralty intention that a general amnesty should cover the actions of the men of the Atlantic Fleet up to the

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time of the receipt by them of the Admiralty order to sail for home ports.

"The past is past," he said, "and it is in the interest of everyone in the Navy or out of it to forget the past." Again, he stated, "I am not going to look back but to look forward," and he reiterated the warning included in the Admiralty order to the Atlantic Fleet: "Any further refusals of individuals to carry out orders will be dealt with under the Naval Discipline Act."

Had Sir Austen Chamberlain remained at the Admiralty as First Lord, and had not a further decision on the part of the Government rendered the inquiries at the home ports stillborn, the Navy would have been only too happy to "forget the past." The tragedy of the autumn of 1931 was that no full inquiry was held. The question of the basic causes of the mutiny at Invergordon was never probed. Instead, there were numberless polite evasions, and the selection of "scapegoats." These tactics convinced the majority of the officers and men in the Royal Navy that the Admiralty desired at all costs to avoid a full inquiry.

With the knowledge at the disposal of both officers and men, there was only one opinion in the Fleet as to why this should be so. Thus confidence in the Admiralty at that time sank to an even lower level. Under such conditions the Navy could not "forget the past." Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes

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was right when he said nearly three years later, "If the Board had taken bold and proper steps on the spot the Service would be happier than it is to-day."

At the time of Sir Austen Chamberlain's speech in the House of Commons, however, the Admiralty genuinely desired a full inquiry, at least so far as the conditions of the men were concerned. On the day after the speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty in the House of Commons a conference was held at the Admiralty.

At this conference the Board of Admiralty met the Commanders-in-Chief of the three home ports—Admiral Sir Hubert Brand from Plymouth, Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt from Chatham, and Admiral Sir Arthur Waistell from Portsmouth. This conference was concerned with methods to be adopted at the forthcoming inquiries at the home ports, and their co-ordination so that there could be no charge of preferential treatment being accorded at any one port.

On the same day instructions were issued to the Commanding Officers of all ships and naval establishments. The instructions were that the Commanding Officers were to investigate without delay the grievances of all men under their command. The Commanding Officers were instructed to forward to the Commander-in-Chief of their home port details of typical cases representative of those which should be brought to the notice of the

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Commander-in-Chief as involving exceptional hardship.

These instructions to Commanding Officers reflected a tendency, even at this early stage, to revert from the "personal investigation" by the Commanders-in-Chief promised by Sir Austen Chamberlain in the House of Commons to the normal naval procedure for the forwarding of requests and complaints. It appeared that the inquiries to be held under the presidency of the Commanders-in-Chief were only to review typical cases of exceptional hardship. Where the reductions in pay were imposing hardship upon so many thousands of men, the selection of typical cases of exceptional hardship by a number of Commanding Officers could hardly be expected to produce the completely uniform action among all ships and establishments which was so essential if complete fairness was to be preserved and demonstrated.

It must be conceded, however, that, for "personal investigations" of the Commanders-in-Chief to deal individually with every grievance put forward would have entailed an enormous amount of work for the inquiries, which would have had to pursue their labours for several weeks, at a time when quick results were necessary if the discontent in the Navy was to be eradicated. Events, moreover, proved that uniform action in the consideration of the hardships involved by the reductions in naval pay was of no account, for the initiative was taken out

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of the hands of the Committees of Inquiry by the Government, which itself provided the uniform action for the whole Navy.

Meanwhile, discontent was again beginning to show itself at Devonport, and on the day before the ships of the Atlantic Fleet arrived at that port from Invergordon the Commander-in-Chief again issued a statement to all the men under his command.

So soon as a Fleet splits up and the ships of the Fleet return to their home ports, these come under the immediate jurisdiction of the Commander-in-Chief of the port.

The statement issued by the Commander-in-Chief at Devonport on September 18th set out in considerable detail the effect of the proposed cuts in pay upon every class of rating. The Commander-in-Chief again pointed out that the proposed reductions applied only to the basic rates of pay being drawn by men, and not to the total moneys which they received when non-substantive pay and allowances were taken into consideration.

During the few days which elapsed between the news of the mutiny of the British Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon and the opening of the inquiries at the three home ports it seemed as if the whole world was anxious to make capital out of the breakdown of discipline in the greatest stabilising force in the world. Speculators and investors in all great cities became panic-stricken and convinced that the

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British Empire was going rapidly to pieces. Individuals, corporations, and Governments fell over one another in their haste to withdraw securities from London and to realise any commitments in the British Empire. The panic of a run on a bank had become the panic of a run on the financial resources of the greatest nation in the world.

In the absence of full and authentic news, the wildest rumours were circulating and adding to the panic. Newspapers on the Continent of Europe printed long and sensational accounts of the mutiny, in the preparation of which imagination had run riot. There were lurid stories of violence to officers. There were stories of the spread of mutiny to places other than Invergordon. Among these was the story of serious discontent in H.M.S. *Iron Duke* at Rosyth—a rumour which gained such wide credence even in England that it had to be denied before the inquiry by the Commanding Officer of the ship.

Following so closely upon the economic blizzard which was just showing signs of abatement, there was no stopping this new panic. *The Times* pointed out, on the very day after the first news of the mutiny had appeared in the British newspapers, that “the improvement in the tone of markets which was observable on Monday and Tuesday was largely lost yesterday. British Funds suffered a general setback and other markets were generally dull in sympathy. . . . Two factors were responsible for the setback. Fear of an early General Election on the

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old party lines . . . and reports of unrest among some of the Naval ratings. . . .”

The week-end, when markets were closed, gave the financial leaders of Great Britain a short breathing-space. They were, however, powerless to stop the drain of gold caused by the world panic over the stability of the British Empire.

On Monday, September 21st, the Bank of England was forced to raise its minimum discount rate to 6 per cent from the already high rate of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

Late on the previous night Great Britain had been forced to suspend the operation of the gold standard. The financial *débâcle* was complete.

In the political field, also, there was tremendous activity. Two days after the first news of the mutiny in the British Navy was flashed round the world the armed forces of Japan occupied Mukden and other cities in Southern Manchuria, thereby initiating a train of events which was to bring the world close to war and which has not even yet been terminated.

In Moscow, and among the Communists of Germany and other States of Europe, there was frank jubilation at the breakdown of discipline in a Service which, by reason of its power for stability, was regarded as one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the path of world revolution. In Germany the Communist Party drafted a telegram of congratulation to the mutineers in the British Fleet.

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Even in America Communism was bent upon seizing the opportunity created by the news of mutiny in the British Navy. On the very day after the first news of the mutiny was received in the United States the International Labour Defence of America sent a cable to the International Labour Defence Offices in London informing the London branch that meetings to protest against any movement towards the punishment of the men implicated in the Invergordon mutiny had been scheduled all over the United States. In New York a great meeting was arranged in combination with other Labour organisations "to protest against any move by the British Government to punish the sailors implicated in the recent Fleet strike."

France became so concerned about the stability of the British Navy that a sloop of the French Navy was sent to Portland to test the state of morale among the British naval forces at that base. They found nothing but loyalty among the personnel of the destroyers and submarines at Portland, and the French officers received such hospitality at the hands of the officers of the British Submarine Flotilla that there was no doubt that the Frenchmen left Portland with the conviction that there was nothing whatever wrong in the British Navy.

In England the agents of the disruptive forces were straining every nerve further to exploit the mutiny and to ensure that the men of the Royal Navy did not revert to normal discipline. They

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were also striving to spread the gospel of mutiny among the men who had remained loyal. The three home ports were full of agitators. Subversive literature was everywhere. Great bundles of pamphlets inciting the men of the Royal Navy to further mutiny were thrown over the high walls of the dockyards and naval establishments. Two leading members of the Communist Party of Great Britain were arrested at one of the naval ports and subsequently found guilty of an offence against the Incitement to Mutiny Act and sentenced to terms of penal servitude.

Naturally, with the naval ports full of political agitators and sailors whose loyalty had recently been shown to be doubtful, precautions had to be taken. To the dockyard ports there also came large numbers of plain-clothes detectives of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard.

The presence of these detectives in the naval ports was well known to the men of the Royal Navy. With the irrepressible instinct for practical joking which is part of the character of every British sailor, the men immediately set about leading them off on wild-goose chases. This was done without malice of any sort, and with no object of leading the worthy detectives away from the pursuit of their own difficult duties.

The presence of plain-clothes detectives in every bar, however, proved an irresistible temptation to the sailors, who forthwith laid themselves out to

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give these detectives a really good run for their money. This was wholly regrettable, for it led to a number of misconceptions among men who were trying to do their duty without knowledge of the playfulness of sailors.

The men of the Special Branch were preoccupied with the sources of disaffection among the men of the Royal Navy. They therefore listened to the talk of the seamen and stokers in the bars at the naval ports. Before the ships of the Atlantic Fleet arrived at their home ports the public houses were full of gossip—gossip in which the efforts of the Communist influences had a definite place. After the arrival of the ships from Invergordon the detectives, not unnaturally, expected to hear even more concrete news in the public houses of the naval ports.

Perhaps the members of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard showed themselves to be over-anxious. Certain it is that a mischievous trait upon the part of the men of the Navy caused them to be sadly misled over many important issues.

The men of the Special Branch, however, were not far wrong in their general appreciation of the situation at the naval ports.

Not only did they have insight into the activities of all the agitators, but they were able to gauge the opinion of the men of the Royal Navy and report that a further and more serious mutiny might well break out unless the grievances of the

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men were speedily redressed. This was no more than the truth, for the men of the Navy were already becoming suspicious of the inquiries which, having been instituted as "personal investigations," had already become little more than reviews of typical cases. Moreover, the untiring efforts of agitators was undoubtedly having an effect upon the morale of a large number of the men in every one of the three naval ports.

There was, in fact, a definite threat of a second mutiny among the men of the Royal Navy—a mutiny which must have been the more serious because of its possible incidence at the home ports. This threat was, however, magnified by the men from Scotland Yard. These men had no intention of magnifying any possible trouble, but they fell victims to the inveterate practical joking of the sailor.

One instance, which took place at Devonport, will serve to illustrate the manner in which the detectives were exploited by the sailors. A few sailors happened to be refreshing themselves in a bar when they realised that a detective was close to them and listening to what they said. One of the sailors immediately seized the opportunity. Burying half his face in his tankard, he asked in a stage whisper whether his neighbour had heard about "Ginger." The other man confessed that he did not know "Ginger" and had heard nothing about him, whereupon his friend, waxing even more

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confidential and burying his face even deeper in his pewter pot, confided the information that "Ginger" was a stoker who had sworn to wreck the engines of one of the largest battleships. The detective, not realising that the whole conversation had been concocted for his benefit, tendered a detailed report, as a result of which a special guard was posted over the engine-room of the battleship concerned to ensure that the plans of "a red-headed stoker" would not materialise.

There is much that is almost laughable about the activities of the detectives at the naval ports at this time. In many cases their reports were certainly coloured by the proclivity of the sailors for practical joking, but in even more cases their reports were concerned with matters of deadly earnest.

There is no doubt whatever that, had not the Government been convinced by the reports of these men of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard that there was a real and immediate risk of further and more serious outbreak, matters would have been allowed to drift until mutiny appeared again, and in a far more serious form. It was the sum of the reports of these detectives which led to the Government taking the initiative out of the hands of the inquiries which the Admiralty had set up at each of the three home ports and announcing a decision which could not, in the ordinary course of events, have been arrived at for several weeks.

The investigations into the hardship imposed

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upon individual ratings of the Royal Navy by the proposed reductions in pay were opened at Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham on Monday, September 21st.

The Courts of Inquiry consisted of the Commander-in-Chief of the port, the Commodore of the naval barracks, and various other principal officers of the port. In each case an officer from the Admiralty was a member of the Court of Inquiry. These Courts of Inquiry met on Monday, but much had been done at the ports between the arrival of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet and the first meeting of the Courts of Inquiry.

Printing presses in the offices of the Commanders-in-Chief of the home ports had been working all night on Saturday, September 19th. These presses were busy turning out a new type of form. This form was to be issued to all men in the home ports. On it they were to declare details regarding their domestic budgets, showing how the operation of the proposed reduced rates of pay would affect their families. These forms were issued to all ships and establishments in the naval ports, with instructions that they were to be filled in by all men considering that the new rates of pay would impose upon them undue hardship, and that they were to be returned to the staff of the local Commander-in-Chief by Monday, September 21st, so that the inquiry could commence work, having before it the complete evidence of the position of all ratings.

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In every ship and every naval establishment officers and men worked unstintingly throughout the week-end in order that the inquiries should have before them, when they opened, a true and concise picture of the hardships to be imposed upon various classes of ratings by the proposed reductions in pay.

During the forenoon of Monday, September 21st, the Courts of Inquiry met at each of the three home ports. At each port the Admiralty were represented by a senior officer: at Portsmouth by Vice-Admiral Lionel Preston, Fourth Sea Lord; at Devonport by Rear-Admiral Percy Noble; and at Chatham by Rear-Admiral the Hon. Plunkett-Ernele-Drax.

The officers serving on the inquiries, whether from the ports or from the Admiralty, entered into their tasks with a sincere desire and determination that all existing grievances should be eradicated, and that, so far as it was possible in view of the demands of the Government for economy, a fair rate of pay should be set up which would be acceptable to all officers and men of the Royal Navy.

The inquiries, however, had hardly begun their work when the warnings of the men of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard who had been employed in the naval ports came before the Cabinet for consideration. Having already been faced with the unheard-of contingency of mutiny in the Royal Navy, no Government Department was prepared to risk a repetition of such a catastrophe. A hasty

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decision was taken, and, as a result, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, announced that the reductions in pay for the three Defence Services, the teachers, and the police were in no case to exceed 10 per cent.

The inquiries at the home ports had met on the morning of Monday, September 21st. At 5.23 that afternoon a general signal was made to all ships and establishments throughout the Navy. This read as follows:

“Immediate. For immediate information of all ships and establishments in your command. The following announcement has been made by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons this afternoon. Begins: The Government, as announced by me on Wednesday last, has been examining details of the proposed scheme of reductions. There are undoubtedly classes of persons who are unfairly affected. The Government has, in view of all these circumstances, come to the conclusion that the simplest way of removing these grievances is to limit the reductions of teachers, police, and the three Defence Services to not more than 10 per cent. This decision will not apply to the higher ranks of commissioned officers in the Defence Services. The balance of the budget will be maintained—ends.”

The signal went on to explain that, in accordance with this decision, officers and men who would, under the original order, have suffered a reduction of their pay on October 1st to the 1925 rates, would

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from October 1st receive the current rate of pay less 10 per cent.

This sudden reversal of policy by the Government came as a complete surprise to all concerned. There is little doubt that, although the teachers and police were mentioned in the statement of the Prime Minister before the three Defence Services, the hasty decision to reduce the cuts to a flat 10 per cent was due to reports that the morale of the men of the Royal Navy was again being undermined by the constant activities of the Communist agitators, and that there was fear of a second and more serious mutiny unless the causes of discontent were immediately removed.

The assurance that the budget would be balanced with a flat reduction of 10 per cent instead of the far greater reductions involved by the universal application of the 1925 rates of pay amazed naval officers, and added in no small measure to the bitterness with which they looked back upon the events of the past week.

To declare that the balance of the budget could be maintained with a 10 per cent cut was tantamount to saying that the imposition of the cuts involving reversion by all naval ratings to the 1925 rates of pay had never been necessary. It was clear to the officers, who knew and understood the beliefs and problems of the men, that a proposal in the first place to reduce naval pay by 10 per cent in the national interest would have been loyally accepted.

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It seemed that the proud traditions of the Royal Navy had suffered through an imposition which had never been necessary, and had therefore been only a blunder on the part of Whitehall. The realisation was to many officers who had the welfare of the Navy truly at heart a bitter comment upon the ineptitude of the administration.

The statement that the proposed cuts were to be abolished, and that a 10 per cent reduction was to be substituted, removed at one stroke the reason for the inquiries, which had begun their investigations only a few hours before at the home ports. The inquiries, however, did not terminate, as might have been expected. They continued to investigate the conditions of the men of the Royal Navy.

On Tuesday, September 22nd, these inquiries finished taking evidence from about 500 men selected as examples at each port, but two days later the Admiralty announced that the ships of the Atlantic Fleet were to remain at their home ports until the second week in October. The Admiralty announcement stated that "this will enable the Admiralty to give full consideration to the reports of the Committees of Inquiry about pay, which have completed their hearings at the Home Ports."

The continuance of the inquiries after the amendment of the pay cuts achieved important results. From the narrow aspect of how a particular reduction in pay would affect certain classes of men,

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the inquiries moved on to the wider considerations of the cost of living of the average sailor who kept a home in or near one of the home ports. As a result, profiteering in rents and other evils came to light, and steps were subsequently taken by the Government and the local authorities to prevent these evils.

XIX

BEGINNINGS OF REHABILITATION

WHILE the ships of the Atlantic Fleet lay at their home ports and the Admiralty were considering the reports of the Committees of Inquiry, the process of reconstructing the edifice of naval discipline was being actively pursued in the ships of the Atlantic Fleet. There was, however, considerable diffidence in dealing with the matter. The officers of the Fleet were still by no means certain of their standing with the men, for they had received no orders or guidance regarding a return to the traditions of naval discipline, and they felt, with some justice, that they would be liable to official censure if their efforts should lead to any further incidents or breaches of discipline. Their attitude was, moreover, affected by the many rumours which were current in the naval ports, the majority of which seemed to point to the immediate danger of a second and more serious mutiny. Lack of confidence among the men had produced the mutiny at Invergordon. Lack of confidence among officers in charge of large bodies of men is even more serious. Such lack of confidence existed in every wardroom during the days after the return of the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to their home ports.

Officially, the process of rehabilitation began on

September 28th. Up till that date the Atlantic Fleet remained without an active Commander-in-Chief, and under the temporary command of Rear-Admiral Tomkinson of the Battle Cruiser Squadron. On September 28th, Admiral Sir John Kelly was appointed to supersede Admiral Sir Michael Hodges—who was still seriously ill in Haslar Hospital—as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet.

It is widely believed among naval officers that the appointment of Admiral Sir John Kelly was not only constitutionally approved by His Majesty King George V, but was definitely made by him in defiance of intrigues for the command which had been prosecuted within the Admiralty. It is certain that King George V, having been trained as a naval officer and having risen to command ships of the Royal Navy through his own merit and not through his royal birth, felt very strongly on the subject of the breaches of discipline which had occurred. King George V, as the senior Admiral-of-the-Fleet and head of the Navy, exercised his powers and saw to it that there was appointed to the command of the Atlantic Fleet the only serving officer of the requisite seniority who possessed the personality to set matters right with the men.

Admiral Sir John Kelly was under no illusions as to the task before him. He realised very clearly that the rehabilitation of the discipline of the Fleet would have to rest, in the first place, upon the personal popularity of the new Commander-in-Chief. He

left no stone unturned to achieve the necessary popularity, and he asked Rear-Admiral Tomkinson to arrange for the ringleaders of the mutiny to be drafted out of the ships before he took over command, so that no men could say that he was responsible for any victimisation.

Sir John Kelly has been criticised by many naval officers for his actions, and for becoming what is known in the Navy as a "popularity Jack." More particularly has he been criticised because he achieved his popularity with the men at the expense, to some extent, of the officers. If one takes the narrow view, one is forced to admit that much of this criticism is justified. It was clear at the time, however, that the thorough reconstruction of the discipline of the Royal Navy would take several years. It would, in fact, occupy the tenure of office of more than one Commander-in-Chief.

It appears to-day that this fact was clearly realised in high places, and notably by the King. The process of re-erecting naval discipline upon its one-time pedestal was carried out by two successive Commanders-in-Chief, each of them appointed by the King. Admiral Sir John Kelly set the spirit of the men to rights, but in so doing he was forced to treat the officers with a certain harshness and remove from them many of their privileges. Admiral Sir William Boyle—now the Earl of Cork and Orrery—succeeded Sir John Kelly, and set up once again the prestige and command of the officers. One

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man alone could not have achieved the desired results, for he would inevitably have laid himself open to charges of vacillation. As it was, the process of reconstruction was entrusted successively to two Admirals who were almost certainly the only two officers of the requisite seniority who could have achieved the essential result.

Although in some senses Admiral Sir John Kelly achieved the rehabilitation of confidence and discipline among the men of the lower deck at the expense of the officers, he never allowed any slight to be put upon any officer by a member of the lower deck. In fact, soon after taking up command of the Atlantic Fleet the new Commander-in-Chief visited every ship of the Fleet and addressed the men in no uncertain terms. Sir John Kelly had a great gift for addressing sailors, and he made it very plain to them that, while they could rely upon him to show sympathy in any case of grievance, he would not tolerate any form of indiscipline in the Fleet.

The men of the Atlantic Fleet who had played leading parts in the mutiny at Invergordon were drafted out of the ships, in accordance with the request of Admiral Sir John Kelly, before he assumed the command of the Atlantic Fleet on September 28th. These men were drafted from the ships to the manning depots of the Royal Naval Barracks.

A curious situation then arose. The men could not be tried by court martial for their part in the

events at Invergordon because Sir Austen Chamberlain had declared in the House of Commons that there was to be no victimisation, and had, by inference at least, promised to the men of the Atlantic Fleet a general amnesty for offences committed before the receipt, on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 16th, of the Admiralty order for the ships to return to their home ports. On the other hand, the men who had been drafted out of the ships were men who, for the most part, had acted as agitators, and were known to exercise a bad influence among their messmates. They could not, therefore, be allowed to continue their service and activities in the Royal Navy.

Among many naval officers it is held that this implied amnesty proved a godsend to the Admiralty in that it enabled them to avoid full inquiry and courts martial which, being by law open to the public and Press, would almost certainly have led to revelation of matters to the detriment of the Admiralty.

The men segregated as men exercising a subversive influence in the Fleet were men who, in word at least, had continued their subversive activities after the receipt of the Admiralty signal ordering the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to sail from Invergordon for their home ports. They could not, therefore, claim immunity under the implied promise of the First Lord of the Admiralty of an amnesty up to the time of receipt of that Admiralty

order. They could not, of course, be absorbed into the ordinary activities of the manning depots so soon as they were drafted out of their ships. To do so would have invited the further spread of disaffection and the possible drafting of these men to ships hitherto unaffected by discontent. A special routine had, therefore, to be devised for these men. They were kept together, and, in order to keep them busy while their future was determined, a special course of "instruction" was devised for their benefit.

Able Seaman Wincott and others have criticised this "course" most bitterly, and characterised it as nothing less than persecution. There seems to be some justification for this view, for there is no doubt that certain officers and petty officers made it their business to "take it out" of these mutineers. It must be realised, however, that, in view of the Admiralty's reluctance to face full inquiries and courts martial, the institution of some such "course" was essential to the maintenance of the strict standards of naval discipline exacted in the manning depots. According to Wincott—and his account has been confirmed by other men concerned—there were thirty-six men discharged to the Royal Naval Barracks from the ships of the Atlantic Fleet at Devonport. Wincott was one of nine men discharged from H.M.S. *Norfolk*, and on their arrival at the naval barracks they found men from H.M.S. *Rodney*, H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, and H.M.S. *Adventure*.

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H.M.S. *Adventure* had been one of the worst ships during the mutiny, and it was found that the morale of her crew was so low that it had been decided to pay the ship off and recommission her with an entirely new crew. Wincott maintains that the thirty-six men discharged to the Royal Naval Barracks who had played important parts in the mutiny at Invergordon "were led to believe that we had been sent in for disposal to ships on Foreign Stations, which is the usual procedure adopted by the Admiralty under such circumstances. . . .

"We thirty-six were formed into three classes to undergo an introductory course. This 'course' was merely a disguise to subject us to severe punishment. We were compelled to drill with a rifle and bayonet continually at the double. We were run off our feet and allowed no time to rest, and we were subjected to rigorous punishment at the slightest provocation. We could see that behind all this were deliberate attempts to intimidate us, but we carried out their orders to the letter."

Wincott's description of the disciplinary course to which he and others were subjected smacks of martyrdom. In some ways it is undoubtedly an exaggeration. Nevertheless, it must be realised that these men were being handled by disciplinarian officers and petty officers who would naturally regard them as representatives of a form of humanity deserving of no consideration whatever. There seems

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to be no doubt that the disciplinary "course" to which the mutineers were subjected was, in certain ways, severe. The severity was increased by the weather conditions, which were showery.

The officers and petty officers in charge of the "course" found that the constant donning and taking off of oilskins became an excuse to waste time. They accordingly ordered the men undergoing the course to parade in oilskins in case of rain, and if rain threatened these had to be worn during all the drilling hours, whether the men were being drilled in the open air or, in the case of sudden and very heavy rain, in the great drill shed. The wearing of oilskins, of course, added considerably to the discomfort of men undergoing such a strenuous "course."

One day of this "course" apparently proved sufficient for the mutineers who had been discharged to the Royal Naval Barracks at Devonport from the ships attached to that port. Wincott has recorded that on the morning after the beginning of the course he and his fellows "requested in the proper Service manner to see the Commander-in-Chief of the port to make a complaint. . . . That afternoon the Commodore of the Barracks addressed us. He said: 'I understand that you have put in a request to see the Commander-in-Chief. That is contrary to rules and regulations, and you will have to see me first. I am quite willing to see any man who thinks he has a complaint. If I cannot give him satisfaction

he will be able to forward his complaint in writing to the Commander-in-Chief. You are not being punished for the Invergordon affair. We all know that it was announced that there will be no victimisation of individuals, but the authorities know that there have been further activities both on board and ashore and you are suspected of having taken part in them. I am a man of intelligence and I shall take what steps I think fit to prevent you people from doing further damage. Mind you, I am not afraid of you, but I am afraid that you will contaminate the minds of some ignorant young urchins who know nothing, and I shall have the painful duty of punishing them.'

"The Commodore had given the game away," asserted Wincott, who, in quoting his remarks, has characterised them as "A Commodore's Blunder." One cannot, of course, accept this statement by one of the mutineers of a speech made to him and his fellow mutineers by the Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks at Devonport as a verbatim report. The substance, however, rings true. No senior naval officer at that time was likely to give to any avowed mutineer further scope to spread disaffection. Moreover, the Commodore was voicing the regulations when he explained that any requests for the Commander-in-Chief, if put forward by men in the manning depot, must first pass through his hands. Wincott has averred that he and his fellows knew nothing of any offences committed "after

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Invergordon,” and he has added: “If the authorities said there had been, why were we not tried by the disciplinary acts signalled by the Admiralty? . . . We had been given no trial. We had not been allowed to state our case.”

This fact might well have seemed strange to the men. It seemed strange also to many officers. There was in the Navy an uneasy feeling that, through obvious necessity, the Admiralty was acting counter to a statement made in Parliament by the political head of the Admiralty—the First Lord. It was felt that Sir Austen Chamberlain had exceeded his duty in promising a general amnesty to the mutineers. While it was realised that some such promise was necessary—in the absence of the Board of Admiralty at Invergordon—in order to achieve a general return to duty on the part of the mutineers, it was also realised that, so far as proved and avowed ringleaders were concerned, the promise could not be kept without the certainty that the subversive influence in the Navy, instead of being rooted out, would grow and flourish.

The possibility that the authorities had proof of further subversive activities on the part of certain men was by no means ruled out by naval opinion, but it was thought that proof of such activities should be forthcoming. The Navy wondered why there should not be courts martial, such as had followed the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia* eight months before. There was in the Navy no sympathy whatever

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with the mutineers, but there was a growing feeling that the Admiralty was avoiding full inquiry or courts martial for a reason of its own. It was not, however, until some time later that this opinion was crystallised by events.

Wincott and his fellow mutineers, who were being subjected to the disciplinary "course" at Devonport, continued to pursue their policy of complaining against the treatment being accorded to them. They asked to see the Commodore again, and stated their complaints to him. These complaints were:

(1) That they were being subjected to an introductory course which was rigorous enough to constitute punishment.

(2) That they had been falsely accused by the Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks of having taken part in activities both on board and ashore since the arrival of the ships at Devonport.

It was hardly surprising that the Commodore was "unable to satisfy" these men, and agreed to forward their complaints in writing to the Commander-in-Chief. The requests of these men did, however, bear some fruit. To the regret of the majority of the officers and of the loyal men in the Navy, they were absolved from further drill in the rigorous "course" to which they had been subjected, and reverted to taking part in the ordinary routine of the manning depot.

It was nearly three weeks before any further action was taken with regard to these men, and

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men of a similar proclivity who had been discharged from ships to the manning depots at Portsmouth and Chatham. Some slight delay might have been necessary in order that the Admiralty should have opportunity to investigate the activities of these men and ensure that there should be no miscarriage of justice. But for the men concerned to continue to be employed for three weeks in the normal routine of the manning depots not only gave them further opportunities for any subversive activities in which they might be disposed to indulge, but served to reopen the question of the mutiny at Invergordon at a dangerous time—when the process of reconstruction was just getting fairly under way.

On November 3rd the men who had been discharged from the ships of the Atlantic Fleet to the Naval Barracks were brought individually before the executive officer of the Barracks. The officer informed each man that "The Admiralty have approved your discharge to shore—services no longer required. You are eligible for unemployment benefit."

Had not these men been actively concerned in bringing about an event which might well have brought the British Empire to its knees, one would be tempted to sympathise with them in their treatment. They had, however, forfeited by their activities any claim upon the continuous employment and subsequent pension which is one of the many attractions of the naval Service.

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If there is a criticism to be laid against their treatment, it is because the fact that they were given no trial by court martial was interpreted as evidence that the Admiralty desired to avoid inquiry and publicity.

The Admiralty erred on the side of mercy in their anxiety that there should be no miscarriage of justice and that no man should be dismissed "services no longer required" who could not be proved to exert an undesirable and subversive influence in the Navy. As a result, about one-third of the number of men discharged to the manning depots from the ships on account of their mutinous activities were "given the benefit of the doubt" and retained in the Royal Navy. In some cases it was not until several years later that it was found that this clemency had been abused, to the detriment of the morale of the Royal Navy.

The men who were summarily dismissed, moreover, could scarcely grumble at their treatment. Not only did they immediately become eligible for unemployment benefit paid by the Government of a country of which they had deserved so ill, but they were given facilities for free railway travel to their homes, and, in addition, a sum of 13s. per head with which to provide themselves with civilian clothing. In no case was any punishment, other than dismissal from the Royal Navy, inflicted, in spite of the fact that, under the Naval Discipline Act which governed their actions as men of the Royal Navy,

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they had laid themselves open to very severe sentences. It is difficult to avoid comparing the treatment accorded to these agitators and mutineers with the probable fate which would have overtaken such men in less democratic countries.

Nevertheless, the treatment of these men was regarded by them and by their champions among the less disciplined factions ashore as "persecution," and a certain amount of political capital was made out of this by the minority movements. The absence of any full official inquiry or the trial of these men by court martial certainly tended to lend a greater degree of credibility to their stories among a considerable section of the public. In the Navy there was a feeling that all the persons responsible for the mutiny at Invergordon had not got their deserts. There were many officers and men who, although they did not concede any reduction of the responsibility laid upon the agitators and ringleaders of the mutiny, felt that there was at least some justice in the tirade of Wincott when he asserted:

"We did not call the strike. The British Government did that by attempting to force their unjustifiable cuts. It is they who should be in the dock charged with 'Incitement to Mutiny.' It is they who should have been victimised and thrown on to the industrial scrapheap to starve."

The mutineers who were discharged from the Navy did all in their power to stir up fresh trouble. Wincott published a pamphlet entitled *The Spirit*

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of *Invergordon*, appealing for funds to prosecute the case of the men who had been "victimised," and seeking to rally the working classes into the development of "an all-embracing unity to meet the class battles that lie immediately ahead." The mutineers sought to secure publication for their views in the great national newspapers, and many of them sought out and petitioned Labour Members of Parliament. They did not, however, achieve the results for which they were working. Public opinion against them, as men who had sought to undermine the stability of the Royal Navy, was too strong.

This feeling in the country against the forces of disruption had been maintained in face of a flood of subversive literature designed to play its part in the General Election. Among many pamphlets was the General Election Manifesto issued by the central committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This carried the exhortation: "Workers! Sailors! Soldiers! Organise now!" and stated that "If millions of workers, soldiers, and sailors form a united fighting front for work and bread, no force on earth can weaken us"; and called upon the supporters of the party to "Answer the attacks of the Capitalists with the strength that the workers showed in the General Strike."

The people of Great Britain, however, had had enough of subversive influences which had gone so far as to meddle with such sacred things as the discipline and organisation of the Royal Navy. It

gave the unmistakable answer at the General Election of October 27th, 1931, which produced a tremendous "landslide" towards the opinion of the Right.

The General Election led to further changes at the Admiralty, where Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell became First Lord in place of Sir Austen Chamberlain, who had had such a brief and unhappy period of office.

The arrival of a new First Lord of the Admiralty, however, did nothing to calm the fears of the officers and men of the Royal Navy, which grew unchecked in the absence of any full inquiry. Admiral Sir Barry Domvile has said, in his book *By and Large*, "The shock of the Invergordon riots had been great. We all felt a sense of shame and deep resentment against those responsible. And as the personnel of the fleet were left in darkness as to who these individuals were, their suspicions were aroused, and their feelings found vent in such an outspoken condemnation of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty as has probably never been known before, and I hope never will be again. So widespread became the detrimental comments on their Lords and Masters in Whitehall that senior officers had great difficulty in keeping a check on these insubordinate utterances."

Admiral Sir Barry Domvile was serving in the Mediterranean in 1931, and his words reflect the feeling in the Mediterranean Fleet. As was the case with

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the proposals to effect the general reductions in naval pay to the 1925 rates, feeling in the Mediterranean Fleet against the Board of Admiralty was not so strong as that in the Atlantic Fleet, in which the personnel was more closely in touch with problems and influences ashore in Great Britain.

Admiral Sir Barry Domville held very strongly that the Board of Admiralty should have resigned. "The Board must have been fully aware of this strong feeling against them in the Service," he wrote. "A corporate body that has lost the confidence of its shareholders is generally expected to resign. . . . The Board of Admiralty made a profound mistake in not resigning promptly when they had lost the confidence of the Service. By failing to do so they ran an entirely unnecessary risk of further trouble afloat, and placed an unfair strain on the officers of the Fleet. That the policy succeeded does not justify it."

The Board of Admiralty which had held office when the proposals for the pay reductions were made, which had led to the mutiny in the Atlantic Fleet, remained in office, except that it had as its head a new First Lord as the result of the Cabinet reshuffle following the General Election. It was thus left to the officers of the Royal Navy, themselves desperately unhappy about the state of affairs in Whitehall, to strive as best they could to build up among the men of the Fleet a return of confidence in the naval administration.

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On October 8th the ships of the Atlantic Fleet left their home ports to resume their interrupted cruise and training period. The Fleet sailed under the command of Admiral Sir John Kelly as the new Commander-in-Chief. Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had reverted to the command of his own squadron—the Battle Cruiser Squadron.

It appears that the Admiralty had been far from satisfied by the minutes of the inquiries which had been held at the three home ports, and the reports on the mutiny which they had received from the Commanding Officers of every ship involved. The Admiralty took the amazing step of sending with the Fleet two naval officers of captain's rank to carry on further investigations of a personal character during the cruise of the Fleet. In order to make it easier for these officers to gain the confidence of the junior officers and men, they were to wear civilian clothes.

Somewhat naturally, this action was deeply resented by the majority of officers in the Fleet, who saw in it proof that the Admiralty did not believe the accounts of the mutiny tendered to them by the Commanding Officers of the ships. Moreover, it was clear that these Admiralty representatives were likely to obtain exceedingly garbled accounts of the mutiny. They carried on their investigations in the wardrooms, gunrooms, the warrant officers' messes, and among the men. Many of the opinions given to them were irresponsible. There was always

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the danger of them being led to believe some extraordinary fiction, and, in the weeks which had intervened since the mutiny, rumour had been so busy that many junior officers and men who had seen only one small aspect of the mutiny honestly believed the most extraordinary tales which they had been told of events elsewhere in the Fleet.

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APART from the extraordinary methods of investigation being applied by the Admiralty, it appeared that, when the Fleet sailed northwards again—this time to shun the Invergordon of unhappy memories and to use Rosyth as its base—the process of reconstruction would be the final action taken with regard to the mutiny. There was, however, to be victimisation among the officers. This led to further recriminations against the Board of Admiralty throughout the Royal Navy.

In no sense were these due to any feeling that officers who had deserved punishment should be accorded more lenient treatment than that meted out to men of the lower deck. Rather is the reverse always true in the Navy. The recriminations against the Board of Admiralty were a result of the fact that it had already so completely lost the confidence of the officers and men of whom it was the supreme head. The Navy did not feel at all disposed to trust the Board of Admiralty in the absence of any full inquiry, and it was very far from believing that the officers who suffered were really deserving of blame. There was in the Navy an uneasy feeling that certain unfortunate officers were being selected as scapegoats who would serve to carry away from

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the Board of Admiralty any blame which, in the eyes of the public, might be accruing to it. In face of such a feeling in the Navy, the victimisation of officers, and even more so the manner in which it was carried out, increased the difficulty of the Navy's task of rehabilitation.

One member of the Board of Admiralty suffered as a result of the mutiny at Invergordon. This was one of the naval members—Admiral Sir Cyril Fuller, Second Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Personnel. There was no inquiry, and no reasons were given for the unexpected retirement of this distinguished officer. It was felt strongly in the Navy that Admiral Sir Cyril Fuller had been selected to shoulder blame which rightly belonged to the Board of Admiralty as a whole.

The Commanding Officers of several of the ships which had been concerned in the Invergordon mutiny were relieved from their appointments and subsequently placed on the retired list. This again led to a reduction of confidence in the Admiralty throughout the Navy. The Navy well knew that the major responsibility for the mutiny lay in Whitehall and not with the Commanding Officers of individual ships, who had handled a situation of extreme difficulty and gravity with great tact and skill.

To make matters worse, Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, who had been placed by circumstances in the unenviable position of being temporarily in command of the Atlantic Fleet when mutiny broke out,

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was one of the officers who suffered. Not only was the loss of this officer a blow to the Navy, but the manner in which it was carried out led to deep resentment.

That Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had handled the mutiny at Invergordon with skill at a moment when the fate of the British Empire hung in the balance was universally recognised in the Navy. A great many naval officers fully appreciated the danger which had existed during those anxious days. They appreciated, also, that responsibility for the mutiny lay with the Board of Admiralty, who had refused Rear-Admiral Tomkinson's request that an immediate investigation should be held at Invergordon by the Board of Admiralty or its properly delegated representatives.

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson, moreover, had received the full and ungrudging approbation of the Board of Admiralty at the time of the mutiny. Not only had he received a warm letter of thanks from Admiral Sir Frederick Field, the First Sea Lord, but he had been personally commended by the First Sea Lord on September 19th—the day on which Rear-Admiral Tomkinson in his flag-ship, *H.M.S. Hood*, had arrived at Portsmouth from Invergordon.

In Parliament two days before, while the ships of the Atlantic Fleet were steaming south from Invergordon, tributes had been paid in the House of Commons to Rear-Admiral Tomkinson by Sir

Austen Chamberlain, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and by Mr. A. V. Alexander, the late First Lord of the Admiralty.

Captain W. G. Hall raised the matter of the way in which the mutiny had been handled by Rear-Admiral Tomkinson. In the House of Commons on September 17th, 1931, he said:

“Another thing that emerges is that the Commander-in-Chief, in the absence of Admiral Hodges, who is unfortunately ill, acted with promptitude, with despatch, and with great common sense. We remember previous incidents that have happened in the Navy when officers in charge have perhaps not seen their duty so clearly as the present Commander-in-Chief.”

By “Commander-in-Chief” Captain Hall meant the flag officer in command of the Atlantic Fleet following upon the illness of Admiral Sir Michael Hodges—Rear-Admiral Tomkinson.

Sir Austen Chamberlain, First Lord of the Admiralty, was quick to associate himself and the Admiralty with the tribute of Captain Hall. He said:

“I was particularly glad to hear the hon. and gallant Member pay a tribute to the Senior Officer commanding the Atlantic Fleet during these anxious days, in the absence of the Commander-in-Chief, who, unhappily, is ill in hospital. The Admiralty have already conveyed to him their full approval of the action which he took, and of his service

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during these times. The compliment which the hon. and gallant Member paid to him is one that is well deserved and which, I am sure, will be most warmly received by the men of the Fleet."

Mr. A. V. Alexander, who had been First Lord of the Admiralty until the formation of the first National Government only about three weeks before, added his tribute:

"The sympathetic and tactful action which the acting Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet has taken is only what I would have expected of him from my knowledge of him."

Rear-Admiral Tomkinson was automatically promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral on February 15th, 1932, upon a vacancy occurring in the Vice-Admirals' list. His promotion was used as an opportunity to supersede him in his command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron.

The Battle Cruiser Squadron was at that time in the West Indies, having left England early in January 1932, when the Atlantic Fleet sailed on its spring cruise. At that time Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had been given no hint that his conduct of the mutiny at Invergordon had been again reviewed by the Admiralty, or that there had been any change in the Admiralty attitude which had so warmly commended him less than three months before. While in the West Indies, however, he read in the wireless press news on February 20th that a Rear-Admiral had been appointed by the Admiralty to

relieve him. This was the first intimation which he received that he was to be superseded in command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron.

Vice-Admiral Tomkinson was astonished at the information contained in the wireless news. He had taken up the command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron only on April 24th, 1931, and it was an appointment which was normally held for two years. He immediately telegraphed to the Admiralty, asking for an explanation of the statement in the wireless press news. The news was confirmed, and he was told that a letter was on its way across the Atlantic to him.

When Vice-Admiral Tomkinson eventually received the Admiralty letter he found that it completely reversed the opinions held and stated officially by the Admiralty just after the mutiny at Invergordon. The letter informed him that he had committed a serious error of judgment at Invergordon in that he had omitted to take decisive action on September 13th and 14th, when dissatisfaction had begun to show itself among the men of the Atlantic Fleet. It stated that if the situation had been well handled on those two days, instead of being allowed to drift, the Board of Admiralty considered it improbable that the outbreak of mutiny would ever have occurred.

In another letter of the same date the Admiralty curtly informed Vice-Admiral Tomkinson that his command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron, to which

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he had been appointed for a definite period of two years, would be curtailed by eight months, and that he would not receive any further employment on the Active List.

On February 24th, 1932, the question of the command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron was raised in the House of Commons by Lieutenant-Commander Bower, who asked the First Lord of the Admiralty what was the normal period during which an officer appointed to command the Battle Cruiser Squadron holds this appointment.

The question was answered as follows by Lord Stanley, the Parliamentary and Financial Secretary of the Admiralty, on behalf of the First Lord: "It is customary for this and other Rear-Admirals' appointments to be held for two years. When, however, an officer is promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral during the tenure of a Rear-Admiral's appointment, the question of his retention of the appointment for the full two years is specially reviewed."

Lieutenant-Commander Bower was not wholly satisfied. He asked further: "Would the noble Lord say whether the supersession of an officer who has only done ten months in the appointment may be assumed to be in the usual normal change of flag appointments, or whether there is some special reason for this change?"

Lord Stanley denied that there was any special reason for the change in command of the Battle

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Cruiser Squadron. "No, sir. Every case is reviewed on its merits. We have always to bear in mind the desirability of giving experience to other flag officers of the rank appropriate to the command."

This was a most curious assertion in view of the fact that the Admiralty letter censuring Vice-Admiral Tomkinson was then on its way to the West Indies.

The Battle Cruiser Squadron has not been increased by the addition of any new ships, yet the last two holders of the appointment have flown their flags as Vice-Admirals in H.M.S. *Hood*. Rear-Admiral Bailey was appointed to the command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron on August 14th, 1934. He was promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral on August 31st, 1935, yet he continued in his command until July 1936. He was then relieved by Vice-Admiral Blake, who had already held the rank of Vice-Admiral for ten months before he was appointed to command the Battle Cruiser Squadron.

When the treatment of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson was raised in the House of Commons by Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes on July 31st, 1934, Sir Roger Keyes told the House that "there are no two opinions in the Navy as to the impropriety of the sudden disciplinary action taken during his absence abroad and when he was not in a position to defend himself. Moreover, that action was taken by the deeply implicated Board which had promised that there should be no penalisation."

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Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes also stated that he had been told by the First Lord of the Admiralty—Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell—that “the hasty action taken during Admiral Tomkinson’s absence abroad, only a month before the squadron was due to return to England, was taken for Admiral Tomkinson’s sake, to spare him the unpleasantness and publicity of certain questions which would have been asked if he had been allowed to retain his command. I know now that these questions were designed to bring about a thorough and impartial investigation into the whole affair. However, the questions were staved off. I pointed out that Admiral Tomkinson had nothing to fear from publicity and that he had courted an inquiry and had asked for it. It was the Admiralty that would not face an inquiry.”

Vice-Admiral Tomkinson visited the Admiralty immediately on his return to England from the West Indies. He saw Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell, the First Lord, and asked for an inquiry, only to be told that the matter could not be reopened.

In the House of Commons, in reply to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, the First Lord of the Admiralty was at great pains to deny that Rear-Admiral Tomkinson had ever received the approbation of the Admiralty for his handling of the Invergordon mutiny, and that the most the Admiralty had done was to signal entire approval of “certain steps, the chief one of which was to send

the Chief of Staff up to London." In view of the definite statement of his predecessor, Sir Austen Chamberlain, in the House of Commons on September 17th, 1931, this denial on the part of Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell seems curious.

The statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes—that action had been taken during the absence abroad of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson for the sake of that officer—is also curious. If the Admiralty had been so considerate of the feelings of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson, surely steps might have been taken to ensure that he received official intimation from the Board of Admiralty before reading of his supersession in the wireless press news, instead of being forced to ask for an explanation from the Admiralty, and not receiving the official Admiralty letter until a considerable time after reading of his supersession.

It is ironical that twice within six months Vice-Admiral Tomkinson should have been placed in an invidious position because the receipt of an official Admiralty letter was preceded by announcements in the Press and on the wireless. It had happened with the Admiralty letter explaining the forthcoming reductions in pay. In that case it had played no small part in causing the mutiny in the Atlantic Fleet.

Even with the retirement of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson the repercussions of the mutiny in the

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Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon were not over. Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, who had been in command of the Second Cruiser Squadron at Invergordon, was duly promoted to Vice-Admiral. In 1935, the year of the Jubilee of King George V, Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton was in command of the Reserve Fleet, with his flag flying in H.M.S. *Hawkins*. In this capacity he was responsible for the correct anchoring and appearance of the Reserve Fleet at the Jubilee Review of the Navy at Spithead. The task of a flag officer in command of the Reserve Fleet at such a time is supremely difficult, for his ships are under-manned and they have to compete on equal terms with the fully-manned and more highly trained ships of the sea-going Fleets.

The ships of the Reserve Fleet acquitted themselves well at the Jubilee Naval Review, and their appearance was favourably commented upon by officers of ships of the other Fleets. After the review, the flag officers in command of every Fleet except the Reserve Fleet received recognition in the form of a decoration. Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton alone was ignored.

This caused considerable comment throughout the Royal Navy, and it was bitterly resented in the Reserve Fleet. Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton himself was resentful of the treatment which had been accorded to him. This was not for a personal reason, but because he felt that a slight had been

put upon the whole personnel of the Reserve Fleet. It was as if the men of the Reserve Fleet, who had worked extremely hard in order to make a good impression at the Naval Review, had been accused of disgracing the Royal Navy. Moreover, Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton felt deeply that such treatment of him must react upon his position as the officer commanding the Reserve Fleet, for he could hardly expect the men under his command to give him unstinting respect and loyalty when it was thus publicly demonstrated to them that he was considered to be in disgrace.

For these reasons Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton decided to protest to the Admiralty. As soon as he was able to leave Portsmouth after the Jubilee Naval Review he went to London and protested to the Admiralty against the treatment which had been accorded to him. It was when he was motoring back to Portsmouth after having lodged his protest at the Admiralty that Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton met with a fatal motor accident.

The Royal Navy deeply regretted the loss to the Service of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson and Vice-Admiral Astley-Rushton, and of the captains who had been superseded after the Invergordon mutiny. Although the treatment accorded to the two Vice-Admirals was deeply resented, it was resented from the point of view of principle rather than from the personal aspect. The Royal Navy, as Commander Marsden has said in the House of Commons, "has

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a wonderful standard of its own, far above that of any other public service, and, I think, far above even that of the political parties of this House, because the rights, and even the wrongs, of the individual must be subordinated to the good of the Service itself."

It was the manner of the treatment accorded to these officers, rather than the treatment itself, about which the Navy felt resentful. It was felt in the Fleet that a full and impartial inquiry should have been held—if for no other reason than to lay once and for all the suspicion that the Admiralty would not face an inquiry.

Because of the creed of the naval Service that the individual must always be subordinated to the best interests of the Navy, there would almost certainly have been greater support for Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes when he raised in the House of Commons the question of the supersession and retirement of Vice-Admiral Tomkinson if he had stressed the need for full inquiry as a matter of principle, rather than the personal issue of the injustice done to Vice-Admiral Tomkinson.

XXI

REHABILITATION COMPLETED

Six years have passed since the mutiny in the Atlantic Fleet at Invergordon—six years in which the rehabilitation of the Royal Navy has proceeded far quicker than could have been thought possible during and immediately after those unhappy days. In the Atlantic Fleet the good spirit of the men was sedulously and successfully cultivated by Admiral Sir John Kelly, who, after his term as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, carried on the same process at the major manning port of Portsmouth. There followed Admiral Sir William Boyle as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, who, while seeing to it that there occurred no setback in the spirit of the men on the lower deck, gave to the officers under his command a new sense of confidence and authority of which many of them were badly in need.

The process of rehabilitation was not carried out without any hitches, but these were small, and were dealt with rapidly and with a resolution which turned even them to value. Some of these hitches—isolated cases of breaches of discipline of a comparatively minor nature—served another purpose. In more than one case the trouble was found to have originated from a single disaffected rating who had been “given the benefit of the doubt” in 1931

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and had prospered in his discontent through the Admiralty promise of amnesty to those who had shown themselves agents of disruption during the mutiny at Invergordon. These men were speedily removed from the Royal Navy so soon as their further activities were discovered. Thus, by a process which was necessarily somewhat slow, but which was none the less effective, the discontented and disaffected elements in the Royal Navy were eradicated.

Lack of confidence in the Board of Admiralty, which, for some time after the mutiny at Invergordon, proved one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of the rehabilitation of confidence and discipline in the Navy, was removed by the appointment of new naval members to the Board of Admiralty. These served under Admiral of the Fleet Sir Ernle Chatfield—now Lord Chatfield—an officer who was known and respected throughout the Royal Navy as a “strong man.” Admiral of the Fleet Sir Ernle Chatfield became First Sea Lord in January 1933, and he at once set about demonstrating to every officer and man of the Navy that the Admiralty was not an inefficient bureaucracy, but a live naval organisation in which the Sea Lords were not mere ciphers.

One factor which has played a very important part in the work of reconstruction which the Navy had to undertake was an influence which appeared from sources outside the Navy itself. This was the

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abandonment of the policy of unilateral disarmament and conciliatory "gestures," and the substitution of the policy of rearmament.

It is difficult to over-estimate the effect which this change in Government policy had upon the morale of officers and men throughout the Royal Navy. They were again given faith in their careers, faith in the use and indispensability of their Service, faith in the Government which ruled them, and the good sense of the nation and Empire which they served. No longer were they faced day after day with the inadequacy of their material to carry out the tasks which would be demanded of them in war. No longer did they see that further reductions might at any moment be necessary to avoid the evils of congested lists in the officer ranks. No longer did they feel that they were serving merely as a means of earning a livelihood. Their beliefs and ideals again took shape after the lean and unhappy years which had led almost to their eclipse.

In March 1935 the British Government issued the first of its Statements Relating to Defence. This White Paper made it very clear that a new and more energetic policy with regard to the Defence Services was coming into being. It promised measures which would make good the well-known deficiencies in the Royal Navy which had proved so bad for morale during the lean years.

It was not until the Mediterranean crisis following upon the Italo-Ethiopian conflict that the British

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public became aware that the ships of the Royal Navy were woefully short of shells and that serious deficiencies existed in the stocks of other essential stores. The deficiencies had, however, been known in the Navy for a long time, and during the years in which economy was put above safety the Navy had been forced to watch the progressive accumulation of deficiencies which would, in the event of sudden emergency, have been likely to prevent it from carrying out its main function of defence of the Empire and its overseas trade routes. Just as this realisation had been a great enemy of morale, assurance that deficiencies were to be made good without delay led to a great revival of morale throughout the Navy.

The Government White Paper on Defence provided a fillip for naval morale in another way also. It stressed the overwhelming importance to the British Empire of the Royal Navy. It set out at length the truth that the very foundation of the system of imperial defence rested upon the ability of the Navy to preserve the sea communications and ensure both the supplies of sea-borne food and raw materials and the free passage of troops and supplies of all kinds between the different parts of the Empire.

In doing so, the White Paper gave the lie to a dangerous doctrine which had been growing up, and which, although it was firmly disbelieved in the Navy, could not but have a deleterious effect upon

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morale in that Service. This was the theory that all navies were obsolete, and that, not only could all the functions of a navy be carried out more efficiently, successfully, and economically by air forces, but that any naval vessel must always be at the mercy of aircraft.

This doctrine was boosted in Press and in Parliament. It began with the treatment by the Press of an exercise off the east coast of Scotland which had been designed solely for the training of Royal Air Force personnel in flying over the sea, and of the naval personnel in keeping efficient aircraft look-outs. Nearly all the newspapers in Great Britain treated this exercise as proof of the theory of air force omnipotence, and carried lurid headlines telling of how the Fleet had been "blown out of the water." There was such a similarity between these headlines that it was believed in the Navy that they had been inspired, and it did not appear to the officers and men of the Fleet that the Admiralty was taking any strong action to protest and prevent the recurrence of such misleading treatment of news.

The Navy sensed warfare between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry, and felt that it was once again being dragged in as a pawn in the political game, and that, through no fault of its own, it was losing the sympathy and confidence of the nation. The Government White Paper on Defence scotched this false doctrine, and placed the three Defence Services

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once again in their proper perspective and relation to one another.

Before the era of disarmament had come to an end there had been brought about an important change in the organisation of the Royal Navy. This was the abolition of the term Atlantic Fleet and the renaming of this force the Home Fleet. The decision to make this change was announced in the following terms in the House of Commons by Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, when he was introducing the Navy Estimates on March 7th, 1932:

“It has been decided to change the name of the Atlantic Fleet. I think the title of Atlantic Fleet is not an altogether appropriate one for a ship in home waters, and when the Atlantic Fleet returns in a few days and rounds Ushant, leaving the Atlantic behind it, and entering the English Channel, it will be called in future the Home Fleet.”

To a layman the mere change of name of this Fleet does not seem to be a matter of any importance. To the Navy, however, it was important. In normal times the Fleet which is now known as the Home Fleet operates in the Atlantic, in the vicinity of Gibraltar, for a little over two months in the year. The rest of the year is spent in the English Channel and North Sea. Moreover, the ships lie at their home ports for approximately one month three times in the year—at Easter, in the summer, and at

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Christmas. On these occasions long leave is granted to the personnel. This Fleet, therefore, was employed almost entirely at home, and the men of this Fleet received the privileges of home service.

In the old days of many fleets, however, the Atlantic Fleet had been accounted a foreign station. The ships did not return to their home ports every three months to give leave to their crews, and the men were therefore entitled to foreign service leave, which is granted on a slightly more generous scale than home service leave, because when on foreign service the men get no opportunity of spending short leave and week-ends at their homes. It had been found that, for this reason, certain misconceptions had arisen among the men of the Atlantic Fleet regarding the amount of leave to which they were entitled. Misconceptions are very apt to lead to argument and discontent, so measures to remove them were taken. The simplest method of removing any misconceptions was to prove to the men that service in the Fleet which returned every three months to the dockyard ports was, indeed, home service, and this was done by changing the name of the Fleet from Atlantic Fleet to Home Fleet.

This step reflects one of the many results of the mutiny at Invergordon. Misconceptions about the leave due to men in the Atlantic Fleet, and discontent over certain anomalies with regard to leave—such as that which came to light in the investigations following the mutiny in H.M.S. *Lucia*—had

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existed for many years. Representations had been made, but nothing had been done. Yet less than six months after the mutiny at Invergordon the misconceptions and discontents over the leave of the Atlantic Fleet were removed by a single sensible action on the part of the Admiralty.

The mutiny at Invergordon was having other important effects upon the administration of the Royal Navy. No longer was it practically impossible for officers to get rid of men who were known to be exerting a bad influence upon their messmates and trying to undermine discipline. Such men were ruthlessly discharged "services no longer required" so soon as there was sufficient evidence against them to prove that no miscarriage of justice would eventuate.

Thus the subversive elements in the Fleet, which had been almost encouraged before the Invergordon mutiny by lack of appreciation of the danger which they constituted, and which had formed "cells" of disruption within the framework of naval discipline, were gradually but surely rooted out. In this task the officers of the Fleet had the whole-hearted support of the vast majority of the men, who had had quite enough of such gentry and among whom there was a tremendous revulsion of feeling against subversive influences. The fact that, in this task of purging the Navy of its undesirables, officers and men worked together for the good of the Service, itself produced firm foundations for a new discipline and loyal co-operation.

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Foiled in their attempt to secure the ultimate downfall of discipline in the Royal Navy—the greatest force for stability in the world, and the greatest obstacle in the way of the realisation of their dream of world revolution—the forces of disruption turned their attention to the dockyards. In the dockyards they endeavoured to undermine the power of the Royal Navy by carrying on a campaign of sabotage in which serious material damage was done to a number of ships.

It was significant that this campaign coincided with the sudden increase in the commitments of the Royal Navy brought about by the policy adopted by the British Government during the Italo-Ethiopian dispute.

Early in December 1935 it became known that a case of sabotage had been discovered in Devonport Dockyard. Serious damage had been done to the main fire-control installation of the battleship *Royal Oak*, which was then nearing completion after having undergone an extensive refit. There was no possibility of the damage having been accidentally caused. A steel sail-pin had been driven into one of the main multi-cored electric cables so as to produce a short circuit in the inner cables. The projecting end of the sail-pin had then been filed down and the covering of the cable carefully replaced, making detection of the cause of the fault extremely difficult.

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On the same day another case of sabotage in Devonport Dockyard was reported. In this case the sabotage concerned the submarine *Oberon*. An iron bolt and a sheet of copper had been introduced into one of the main propelling electric motors of the submarine in such a way that, had they not been quickly discovered, very serious damage would have been caused to the great motor. A Court of Inquiry found that the objects had been deliberately introduced into the motor with the object of causing damage.

It immediately became clear that the campaign of sabotage, like that of persuading men to mutiny, was world-wide. At almost the same time a serious case of sabotage to a naval vessel was reported from America, in which serious damage was caused to the main turbine reduction gearing of the new cruiser *Quincy*.

Soon afterwards sabotage was reported in Chatham Dockyard, in which the main electric cable of the cruiser *Cumberland* had been short-circuited in a similar manner to that adopted in H.M.S. *Royal Oak* at Devonport.

In March 1936 sabotage broke out in the dockyards of contractors engaged upon construction for the Admiralty. At Barrow-in-Furness, when the new destroyer *Griffin* was running her trials, it was discovered that three brass bolts had been introduced into the reduction gearing of the main propelling machinery. A month later a spanner was

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discovered in the machinery of a submarine at another dockyard.

Many other cases occurred, both in the Royal Dockyards and in contractors' works. In the Royal Dockyards, however, they became less serious and more infrequent. The efforts of the men of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard were bearing fruit. There had been summary dismissals from the royal dockyards. The forces of disruption were being successfully driven out of the seat of yet another of their enterprises.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of Admiralty, thus summed up the activities of these forces in the House of Commons on January 27th, 1937, when replying to a question about sabotage in the Royal Navy:

"There are at present 58,500 workmen employed in the dockyards and naval establishments at home, of whom about 49,000 are called hired workmen and about 9,500 are established workers. The nature of the work done by these men in the dockyards places them in a very special, and even unique category. A mistaken act, whether wilful or accidental, might endanger the safety of His Majesty's ships and the lives of the men serving in them. Ten or twelve years ago a new and formidable problem was added to the problem of dockyard administration. Up to that time there had been occasional attempts to obtain some information from men working there. But about this time there was a

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concentrated attempt made to spread disaffection in the dockyards and even to spread mutiny amongst naval ratings. So serious were they that special instructions were sent to the dockyards in which very great stress was laid upon the necessity for obtaining the confidence of the men, and, if possible, of ensuring that only loyal men on whom they could depend were employed. That action had some result but did not entirely remove the danger. Indeed, in the course of the next year or two, a series of incidents took place in the dockyards that forced the authorities to redouble their precautions. In the case of the oiler *War Afridi* in March 1933, it was found that sand and brass filings had been placed in the machinery while the ship was in dry dock at Devonport. In October 1935, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Oleander* at Devonport was discovered to have nuts in the machinery, causing stoppage of the main circulating pump, and the mast-rope was unrove. Investigations showed that the articles concerned must have been inserted deliberately."

Sir Samuel Hoare went on to deal with cases of sabotage in naval ships which have already been mentioned. In conclusion he said :

"When I spoke in answer to a question last week of what I had learnt of the subversive activities of certain men calculated to endanger the safety and welfare of the State, I meant something much more definite than the possession of any political views. I meant quite definitely actions and associations that

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were calculated to cause actions to the detriment of the State and of the Navy in particular, actions of sabotage and of mutiny and of disaffection among men in the State's Service. Inquiries led me irresistibly to the conclusion that we could not repose the required confidence in certain men and that the dockyards would not be safe as long as these men were employed in them."

The First Lord went on to vindicate the dismissal of certain men from the Royal Dockyards upon evidence supplied by the Special Branch of Scotland Yard. He also stated positively that the acts of sabotage were instigated by a superior organisation outside the dockyards. When the operation of these agents within the Royal Dockyards was checked by the dismissal of all men known to be associated with the forces of disruption, these forces turned their attention to the works and shipyards of private firms carrying out orders for the three Defence Services. These forces became very active on the north-east coast. It was clear that they drew inspiration and revenue from abroad, but it was very difficult to lay the agents by the heels. The law of England will seldom allow of a trial being held *in camera*, and the officers of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard would be robbed of much of their effectiveness if their methods and evidence had to be declared in open court. Moreover, the law is always most jealous of the rights of the workers and the liberty of the subject.

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The agents of revolution did not confine themselves during these years after Invergordon to their campaign of sabotage in the dockyards. Attempts to promote disaffection in all the armed forces continued, though with virtually no success.

In the *Labour Monthly* of May 1932, Wal Hannington, of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, wrote:

"Upon the N.U.W.M. devolves the task of not only leading the fight of the unemployed, on the simple issues which confront them, but arousing them to a much more complete understanding of the cause of unemployment and war. In this way those who are driven into the armed forces will enter with their eyes open, knowing how to say Invergordon and knowing how to do other things beside obeying orders."

Three years later, the Attorney-General, referring to the Incitement to Disaffection Act, said:

"The troops are loyal to-day, but an organisation now exists for the deliberate purpose of changing that happy state of affairs. It is financed and directed from abroad."

The movements which, in the years following the mutiny at Invergordon, might have been thought to operate against the return of true confidence and discipline in the Royal Navy had the opposite effect.

The naval personnel was already disillusioned as regarded the fair promises which had in the past attended the activities of the agitators amongst

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them. The sabotage campaign strengthened the determination of the men of the Navy to have no more to do with such influences. There is to the sailor nothing more abhorrent than the man who will do wilful damage to a ship, which he regards, not as a steel structure full of mechanism, but as a living organism.

The crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean also played its part, as has the Spanish Civil War. In each case, although extra work and discomfort was demanded of the personnel of the Royal Navy, the officers and men felt that they were at last doing a real job of work, and were earning the respect of most of the civilised world. Where, for many years, there had been a growing feeling of impotence, there arose a feeling of power and of the need to set an example to all other nationalities. The morale of the Royal Navy grew rapidly under these influences.

The Spanish Civil War had another effect. It demonstrated to the men of the Royal Navy that many of the individuals whom they had followed into mutiny at Invergordon were adventurers without a country, for many of them were to be found fighting on the side of a Government which professed to receive no assistance from outside sources. Wincott was said to be in Spain. Copeman, his friend and fellow mutineer in H.M.S. *Norfolk*, was wounded outside Madrid, and rose to command the British Battalion of the International

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Brigade. Brockway was also reported to be fighting with the International Brigade, as was Payne, another ex-naval man, when he was taken prisoner.

Perhaps it was an action of providence that all the developments of world affairs tended to help in the rehabilitation of the discipline and spirit of the Royal Navy. The fact remains that the affairs of the Navy have, in the few years since the mutiny at Invergordon, taken strides which would have been impossible in normal times.

There have been one or two minor incidents in which men have taken action in defiance of discipline. There was a case in H.M.S. *Guardian*, and it was discovered that one of the men chiefly concerned was one who had been given the benefit of the doubt after Invergordon and had been allowed to remain in the Navy.

More recently, in H.M.S. *Warspite*, some ratings were prevailed upon by agitators to resort to a form of collective action instead of preferring a grievance in the proper manner. Again, it was a grievance, more fancied than real, concerning leave. It is noteworthy that this was another case of a ship being manned from a depot other than of the port to which the ship belonged. H.M.S. *Warspite* was a Portsmouth ship, undergoing repairs at Portsmouth, but she was manned from Chatham. Investigation showed that two or three men in H.M.S. *Warspite* had been instrumental in persuading some of their messmates to resort to collective

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action, and these men were speedily discharged from the Royal Navy.

Both these incidents were of a very minor character, but, because they were concerned with the discipline of the Royal Navy, they received attention out of all proportion to their importance. The Royal Navy consists of more than 100,000 men, drawn largely from spheres of life in which collective action has come to be regarded as a weapon to be used upon the slightest provocation. The infrequency of even minor incidents of this type in the Royal Navy surely demonstrates the great strength of naval discipline.

Invergordon, like every other event of history, has its lessons, and it is essential that they should be learned. Among them is the need for realisation of the fact that the British sailor of to-day must be treated as a human being capable of thought and feeling, and that he is an intensely proud man, who deeply resents meddling in his affairs by civilians who do not understand him or his problems.

At Invergordon, as in every one of the minor incidents which have occurred in the Royal Navy, one thing stood out—that the fundamental loyalty of the men remained unshaken by what was, to them, a purely domestic crisis.

There can be nothing seriously amiss with such a Service.

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S C O T L A N D

ROSS & CROMARTY

SALTBURN

INVERGORDON

CROMARTY

BLACK ISLE

DINGWALL

FORTROSE

INVERNESS



CH FIRTH

TAIN

N

D

NIGG

M O R A Y

North Sutor

CROMARTY

Whistle Buoy

South Sutor

F I R T H

PORT GEORGE

ONAIRN

Scale of miles



